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#55

Your Travel Guide To N.J.'s Local Legends And Best Kept Secrets



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## EVEN A HALFWIT KNOWS TO PROTECT HIMSELF FROM COVID-19!

This fiberglass giant has been goofily grinning at passing motorists traveling along Route 73 in Winslow Twp. since the 1950s. One of a number of characters designed and manufactured by the International Fiberglass Company in the mid-twentieth century, this model is commonly referred to as a "Halfwit" or "Snerd." The statue stands about 22 feet tall at the entrance to Mr. Bill's restaurant, which closed in 2014. Fortunately the happy halfwit was not sold off to some mini-golf course at the time and was still standing tall when new owners John and Cheryl Ernst purchased the business a couple of years later. They gave the lovable Alfred E. Neuman lookalike a power washing and a fresh coat of paint and reopened Mr. Bill's in 2016. They've been going strong ever since, offering great food and ice cream. So, the next time you're in the Pine Barrens and see this dopey looking doofus, stop in to Mr. Bill's for a bite, and tell them *Weird NJ* sent you! -Mark and Mark

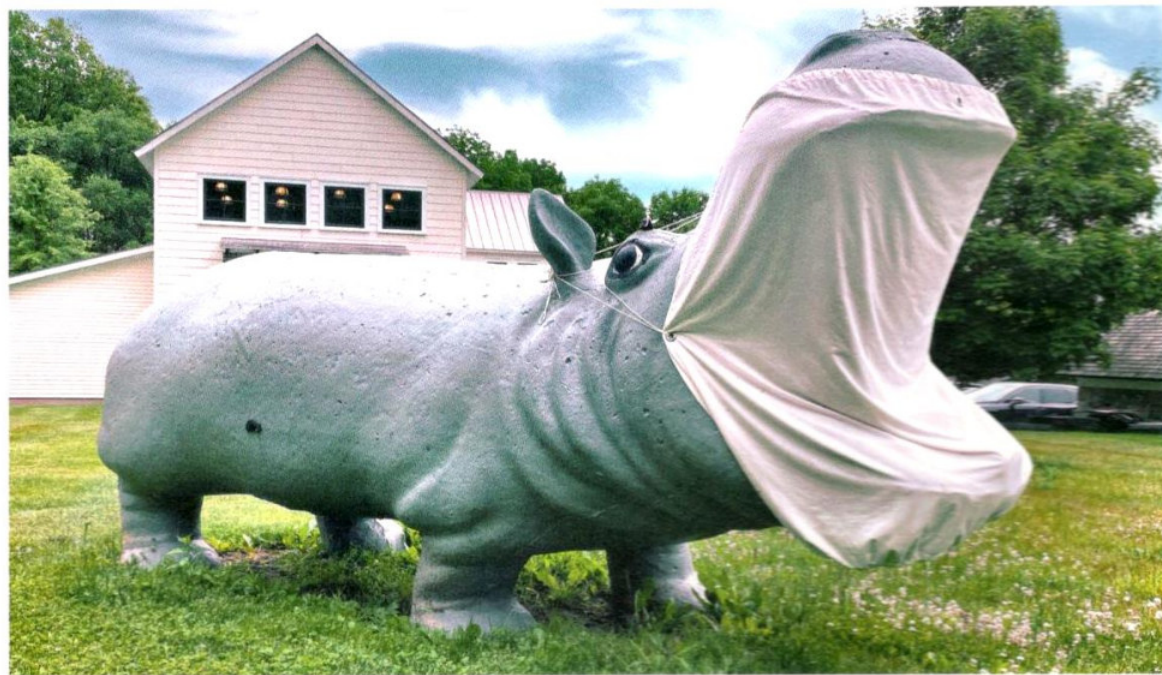


PHOTO BY MARK MORAN

## A MASKED HIPPOPOTAMUS? WHY NOTAMUS?

Even the giant hippopotamus that stands on the lawn of the Oldwick Animal Hospital knows the importance of personal protection during these pandemic days of the coronavirus. This hippo, which is sometimes paired with a smaller baby hippo, can be found at 130 Oldwick Road in Whitehouse Station. The mother and child are often dressed in seasonal attire to celebrate a variety of holidays. This past summer though, surgical masks seemed the most appropriate wardrobe accessory to be outfitted in.



# Weird NJ News

Compiled By Joanne M. Austin

We love to get news and updates from Weird NJ readers! For the best chance of our seeing them and giving you credit, please send them to [editor@weirdnj.com](mailto:editor@weirdnj.com). Note that credit consists of your name appearing in glorious print at the end of your submission and not a free issue.

**OPENING THE FLOODGATES IN PASSAIC:** A Newark woman could count herself as extremely lucky in the beginning of July 2020, when a flash flood carried her for almost a mile through the Passaic, NJ drainage system and out to the mighty Passaic River. [northjersey.com](http://northjersey.com) reported that the woman attempted to drive through a flooded area impacted by a recent storm, but the water started to carry her car toward a viaduct. She got out of the car to escape but was carried into a brook that runs under Passaic and to the river. The water was moving at 30mph, according to [Northjersey.com](http://Northjersey.com), so the whole incident played out before help arrived. She did not appear to be physically injured immediately after her ordeal but was unsurprisingly shocked at what had happened to her.


**BOUND BROOK'S PICKLE BANDIT:** In June 2020 [News12.com](http://News12.com) reported on a series of events that had residents of one Bound Brook neighborhood brining for answers: "Someone has been leaving pickles strewn about their properties for several months, and no one knows who is responsible." Thanks to staying closer to home due to the pandemic, neighbors started to share their experiences, finding out that they were not alone in being pickled by an unknown party. The Pickle Bandit left behind a wide variety of pickles in various locations according to [News12.com](http://News12.com): "There have been dill spears tossed in the driveways. Whole crisp gherkins found on front steps. Bread and butter pickle slices lying like cucumber roadkill on the sidewalk." Still, nobody knows who the Bandit is or what their "dill" is.



into their field of view." One of them filmed the sighting, and the video shows the lights gliding easily in the sky in a fixed triangular shape for about two minutes before being obscured by trees. The witness felt the light formation was not caused by lanterns—a common hoax that people have mistaken for UFOs.

**ARTHUR BRISBANE FLAMES OUT:** The long-closed Arthur Brisbane Child Treatment Center, located in Wall Township and featured in Issue #50, was destroyed in a May 2020 fire, as reported by [nj.com](http://nj.com). The building, once home to Arthur Brisbane, "a columnist and editor for the Hearst newspaper empire" was converted into a facility in "1948 to treat the most difficult cases of emotionally disturbed children." It closed in 2005, and vandals had been slowly destroying the building since 2012. After the two alarm fire was extinguished, [nj.com](http://nj.com) said Monmouth County Public Works came in to take down the building's remains.

**HOBOKEN'S DOORWAY TO NOWHERE:** A large, black framed, empty doorway can be found at 1101 Washington Street in Hoboken, NJ—and there are some who think it's the only remaining part of a building that burned down at that location in 1980. They would technically be wrong, as the *Hoboken Patch* wrote in March 2020, but there's a story as to why it's there that does involve a building that did burn down there that year. It was one of many buildings that went up in flames during an arson wave in Hoboken that lasted from 1978 to 1981—a wave that got rid of older buildings to make way for refurbished or new condos that were in greater demand. The wave had its human toll, though—many



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of the fires resulted in people dying, often women and children, victims of gentrification. The arsonist(s) were never caught, and the empty doorway at Washington Street is "one of a number of symbols in the



city that reminds people of a tragic time." —Thanks to Scott Houston

#### SEWING A NEW FUTURE FOR CLARK THREAD:

Hudsoncountyview.com reported in February 2020 that the eight buildings making up the historic Clark Cotton and Thread Company factory in East Newark would be preserved and converted into housing, retail, and commercial space. The factory, which appeared in Issue #49, was built in 1875 and "was once the largest thread manufacturer in the nation." The knowingnewark.npl.org website has a page dedicated to the company's history in the area, including a description of the buildings that appeared in Newark's *Daily Advertiser* newspaper, which included a main building, a turning shop (for turning spools), a picker house (for picking and blowing cotton) and a bleaching room. There were two towers at the rear, one of which had an interesting feature: "the upper story...is to be fitted with glass windows for the watchman, who will keep a sharp lookout over the entire premises, and give warning of the approach of river thieves." Bells will be located there to provide a warning in case of danger." Think of it: river thieves on the Passaic.

#### NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS FOR THE WORLD'S TALLEST WATER SPHERE:

*Weird NJ* originally wrote about Union's World's Tallest Water Sphere and its related museum and blog in Issue #32. There was an update in February 2020, covered by News 12: Dan Becker, the curator of the museum and website issued "a tongue-in-cheek press release that the museum is struggling with traffic and crowd size, so he has launched a virtual museum dedicated to the beloved landmark." That's probably prescient in these COVID-19 times, and you can visit it at [www.worldstallestwatersphere.com/museum](http://www.worldstallestwatersphere.com/museum). Much easier than visiting the physical museum, which has been located in Austin, Texas since 2003. —Thanks to Dave Vasa



**COVID-19 COMPENDIUM:** A global pandemic is a weird, frightening, and largely unfunny thing to experience no matter where you are on the planet. Especially when it comes to death, potential related long-term illnesses, and loss: of family, livelihoods, homes, and of the freedom to experience both mundane and special events of life as we're all used to. New Jerseyans were among the hardest hit in the earliest days of COVID-19 hitting the U.S., and we mostly managed it well.

But there were some in the Garden State who managed to put their own obnoxious stamp on COVID-19. In March, the *Cherry Hill Courier-Post* reported on stay-at-home orders not being followed by some. They shared the State Attorney General's list of actions that resulted in various charges, including hosting large gatherings, refusing to wear masks inside businesses, and spitting or coughing on people, including essential workers. In one case, a "Pitman woman allegedly tossed a Molotov cocktail at a boyfriend's residence that did not detonate, but resulted in arson charges and weapons offenses." Another woman, who did not have the virus according to the Attorney General's office "allegedly told emergency dispatchers she had the virus in an effort to

**Haunted Dolls / Urban Legends / River Resurrections / Eternal Lights / Cursed Songs / Grave Robbers / Santeria / Possessions / Shadow Creatures / Hell Hounds / Satan / Doppelgängers / UFOs / Ghosts / Poltergeists / Vampires / Cattle Mutilations / Phantom Brides / Bold Rescues / Faith Healing / Vortices / Religious Ecstasy / Precognition / Bombs / Haunted Hotels / The Virgin Mary / Homicidal Psychopaths / Cursed Highways ...** these are a few of the legends my Puerto Rican family has encountered throughout the years.

The Zayas family has always been **unique** in its connection to the **supernatural**. As its youngest member, I wanted to preserve all the **crazy** stories my family told on stormy nights during my **childhood**. But what started out as an attempt to chronicle our oral traditions, took a **surreal** turn when I began working at **The Atlantic County Courthouse** in Mays Landing, NJ.

There, increasingly **sinister** events forced me to face the **horrors** of my past and come to terms with my place within the "**Forbidden Zone**" of weirdness that surrounds my family - what we call ...

## The ZAYAS Zone

by David Zayas

### The Zayas Zone:

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## CELEBRATING THE 4TH, NEW JERSEY STYLE

This year was my family's 49th 4th of July celebration party. The theme for 2020 was New Jersey. I made the world's biggest pork roll and cheese on an everything bagel. The dimensions were 20 inches. I took 5 pounds of pork roll from Trenton N.J. and smoked it in the back yard in my smoker. I cooked 49 eggs (4 lbs) and added 3 pounds of cheese, all on a 10-pound bagel. When completed, it was 7 inches thick. It was one of the best things I ever ate.

To top the day off, a stealth bomber and jets flew over my house. They were on their way back from NYC after a flyover of the Statue of Liberty. It felt very patriotic and surreal. -Kevin Myer

close down Essex County College."

And in case you think those of us in 2020 are worse at social distancing than our cohorts from the 1918 influenza epidemic, think again. A *Medium* article authored by Donald D. Groff detailed the shenanigans that ensued when Philadelphia residents learned that, while their city's bars remained closed, the bars across the river in Camden were open for business starting before noon on October 25, 1918. Thirsty Philly residents took ferries across the Delaware to get to the action, and the result was such a drunken mess that the Camden Board of Health ordered the bars closed again by 10:45 PM, though by then the jails were full of residual partiers from PA. Philadelphia looked at what happened in Camden and Gloucester, declared that it would not happen there when they reopened bars on October 30, and surprisingly, bar goers were well-behaved from there on out.

The closures also gave rise to vandalism to historic buildings in at

## X-RAY'S ANIMAL CORNER

*In memory of X-Ray Burns, who was Weird NJ's Honorary Animal Editor at Large until he left this mortal coil in February 2019, we bring you news from the animal kingdom.*

**THAT'LL DO PIG, IN FREEHOLD TOWNSHIP:** She must have been a sight to behold on a hot July afternoon, running along Route 9 in Freehold Township: a large, pink, determined pig that would soon be dubbed "Babe." Dailyrecord.com reported that initial attempts to capture her by the Freehold Township police and Western Monmouth Animal Control were not successful, so they called in the Freehold Township SPCA for backup—and tranquilizer guns. It took three hot, sticky hours of chasing the 400 pound Babe and three tranquilizer darts to slow her down to a point where the SPCA could capture her when she stopped to wallow in a cool creek. Even then, according to dailyrecord.com, she fought her rescuers before they could load her into a truck for transportation to a temporary refuge a Marlboro farm, where she would wait in case her owners decided to claim her. So Babe's bacon was saved, but there may have been another needing rescue: a larger male pig that was allegedly "on the loose near the Monmouth County Jail" in the township.





least one part of the state: the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. In April, the *New Jersey Herald* reported there were 13 incidents of vandalism there, mostly to historic buildings located in Walpack. Vandals broke windows and doors and left behind graffiti. The Walpack Historical Society was having nothing of it, writing on their Facebook page, "Wanton and disgusting behavior has occurred" and noting, "Every time someone illegally enters a building or destroys a piece of a property something is lost to all of us." The *Herald* also reported that a spokesperson for the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area said damage had been "done to the park's gates, toilet paper has been stolen and hand sanitizer dispensers have been ripped off the walls of the park's restrooms. Additional sanitizer bottles were also stolen." For more on the Walpack Center, including how to report vandalism to the property and structures, see page 58.



Matthew Tribulski reads *Weird NJ* on the Graffiti Highway in Centralia, PA.

## FRINGE TOUR: PENNSYLVANIA

**END OF THE ROAD FOR CENTRALIA'S GRAFFITI HIGHWAY:** CNN reported in April 2020 that an abandoned stretch of Route 61 located near Centralia, PA—a highway damaged by coal-fueled fires burning underground—was to be covered with truckloads of dirt to discourage trespassers from visiting. It ends a long tradition of people leaving colorful graffiti on the three-quarter mile stretch of road, closed since 1993. A contractor told a CNN affiliate that the dirt would be dumped and leveled off, then planted with trees and grass—all in hopes of stopping large crowds from gathering to party and set fires, and preventing liability issues for the property owners. The nearby town of Centralia is well-known for the fires burning beneath it since 1962, when a trash burning ignited a seam of coal underground that's still burning, forcing almost all of the residents to leave and homes and businesses to be relocated. See our obituary on page 69.

## A NEW BOOK IN OUR MAILBOX

I'm a native of Atlantic and Camden Counties and originally created these stories as campfire tales to impress my younger brother. They've since morphed over the years. The stories are dedicated to my brother, who was a Marine Veteran. He died in 2014 after a four-year battle with PTSD.

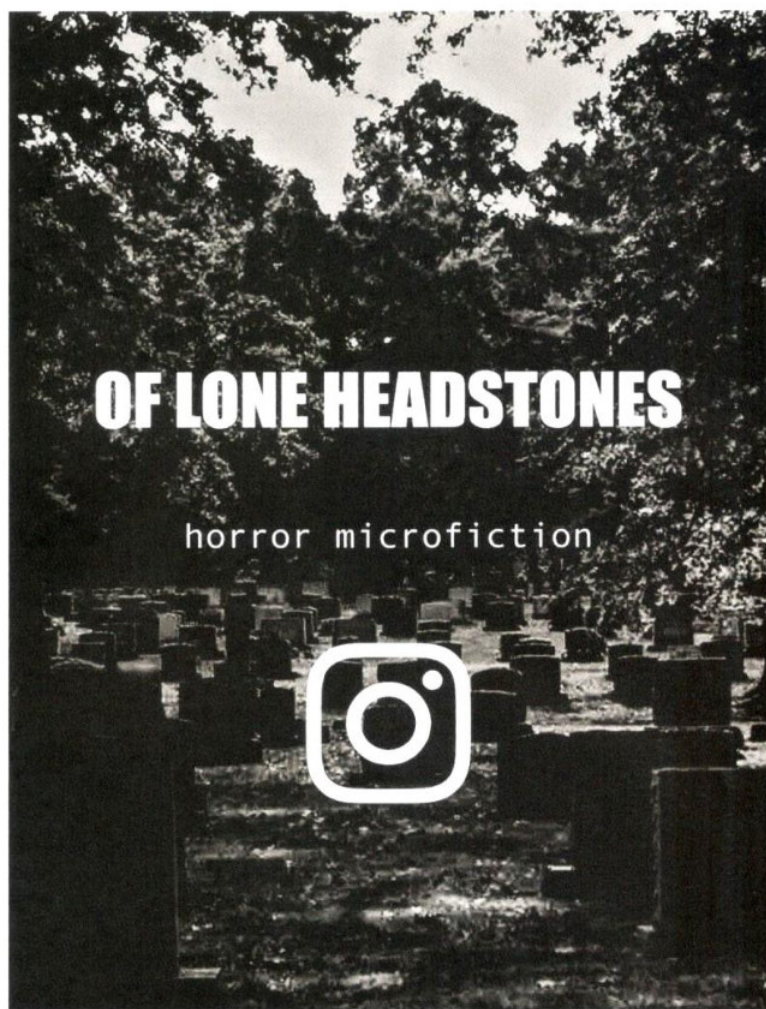
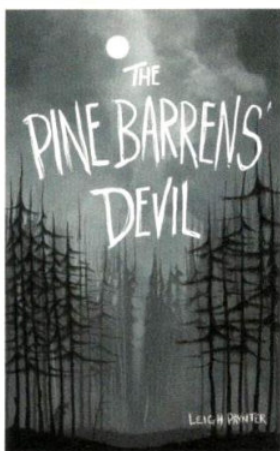
Here is the description:

For centuries, rumors persist of a demonic creature that haunts the Pine Barrens, a labyrinth of pine and cedar trees, mist covered bogs and abandoned colonial villages that stretch through the middle of New Jersey.

For most New Jerseyans, the Jersey Devil exists somewhere between shadow and spectre. But the Pine Barrens is a very real place—an entity—harboring its own dark secrets and desire for self preservation. The enigmatic forest can seal a traveler's fate—not everyone who walks into the Pine Barrens comes out.

This book tells the tales of four travelers through different periods in American history, who vanished after encountering the Pine Barrens' Devil.

The novella is available in Kindle and paperback on Amazon.com.



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# Weird NJ Mail



My dad and I came across this strange art sculpture on somebody's mailbox. I call it "The Chest of Chester" located in Chester, NJ! -Matt M.

## The Legend Of The Mahtantu

Dear Weird NJ:

Since the time of the Leni-Lenapes there has been a spirit creature called the Mahtantu. There is not much information left on the Lenape or their legends. This particular creature is a shared legend by two known tribes. The well known Lenape, and the long-gone Metedeconk tribe, who inhabited the Metedeconk River.

As the legend goes the Mahtantu is the spirit of evil, not so much the devil as Europeans had perpetuated. Early Europeans had made the comparison to the devil because of its nature to stay out of towns and villages of both Europeans and Native Americans. The Mahtantu is confined to the forest, it can not enter cities and towns and stays just out of eyesight of city dwellers. Once people enter the forest it can begin to take hold on them. Most people who enter the forest are never affected, it does not pick out those who can defend themselves, or those defended by others. It begins to weaken your spirit, attempting to get you lost, afraid and isolated. It then preys on those it has already affected, dragging them down, and providing them to the forest.

-Jack Wardell

## A Leeds Descendant Chimes In

Dear Weird NJ:

My name is Brett Leeds. Long-time reader of *Weird NJ*. Just received my new issue (WNNJ #54) and the article on page 26 regarding Jeremiah made me laugh. As stated in the article there are many branches of the Leeds family tree. As far as I know, I'm on the 13th branch/generation of this lineage. Daniel would be the first. My father Robert is 12th generation. Anyway I've got a really cool wood carving of ol' JD that I'm going to share with you soon. I'm so glad you guys are keeping Joisey weird!



## I See Dead Farmers

Dear Weird NJ:

As I was turning onto Route 537 in Freehold and waiting for the traffic to pass, I noticed there were large, orange pylons on the side of the road.

As I made my left, there among the pylons was an old man—maybe in his 80s and wearing blue overalls and a baseball cap—walking in front of an old blue pick-up truck maybe from the 1920s. I saw right through him, truck and all! I can still see his face! As I completed my turn he was gone.

Freehold is an old farming community. I guess it was just an old farmer and his truck living in the afterlife. So cool and unforgettable! -Diane Bongo, Millstone

## Smashing Tillie

Dear Weird NJ:

You mentioned that Tilly's predecessor was at the old Coney Island Steeplechase Park. Here's a great one for "six degrees of separation": after Steeplechase closed, it was purchased for redevelopment by Fred Trump, yes, father of Donald. This was in 1965. Because he knew the neighborhood wanted the site preserved, he held a big gala where you could pay to throw a rock through the plate glass window with the iconic "Tilly" figure on it. He never was able to develop the property and sold it. So...from Tilly to Donald...three steps. And I'll leave any political commentary to others.

-Pat, Willingboro

## The Legends Surrounding Whipporwill Valley Road

Dear Weird NJ:

I was born in N.J. and lived in Middletown Township, Belford to be exact. I can remember a story that was on the front page in the *Asbury Park Press* when I was young.

It all seemed very sensational, there was a group of devil worshipers, a marble pool and a very long colonnade of ornamental stones 10' tall. Of course we can't forget the "altar" where babies were sacrificed.

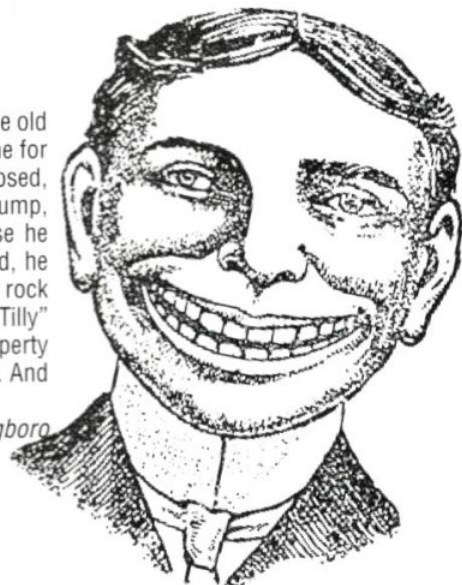
I am in my mid 40s now but one day, when in my 20s, a friend of mine and I decided we were going to look for this place. The paper said the entrance was off of Whipporwill Valley Road with a sign painted on a large tree next to a path that said, "This way to hell," or something like that. Mind you if you don't know this story already what I'm describing is 100% fact, except for the devil worshipers of course, I cannot make claim to that part of the story.

We made our entry from Cooper Road behind the golf course on foot. We walked up the driveway that led to a large estate, but maybe halfway up the drive we made our entry to the woods and a few hundred feet later we were astonished as we came upon what seemed like a community made for small people. There was or is still a small chapel, homes and a wooden water tower, all seeming to have been built in the 1800s or early 1900s.

As we made our way past the town in the woods we were even more excited to find what seemed to be the remains of a marvelously grand estate, including a large pool with white and black marble lined walls, and a double colonnade with roses growing all along the length of them that had to be 50' or longer.

I have been out of Jersey for many years and it's been hard to keep up with your magazine so I don't know if you guys have already found and confirmed all of these amazing things. If you have not I STRONGLY suggest you do. What you will find is nothing short of amazing. Here's to being hopeful. -Frank

Frank - You may find it hard to believe, but that site was featured in Issue #54 of *Weird NJ*. We did not know about its allegedly "satanic" history though. Thanks for the additional information. -Eds.











## More Emeryboarding!

Dave Emery sure gets around! This time at Clinton Road, the Boonton Railroad turntable, the George Washington Bridge, and with Mighty Joe and the Bayville Dinosaur.

## Weird NJ Gets Around

Dear Weird NJ:

I have been living in El Paso, TX for over 2 1/2 years. Originally I am from Utah, and traveled lightly, but have not made it to the Northeast. I love going to swap meets and places that sell used items, and I gravitate toward the books and magazines. So when I came across your magazine, from the year 2012, I snagged it and was very pleased with it. Since I have not traveled much, I love finding random literature and especially filled with interesting articles about places I hope to visit. I noticed an article about someone who came across your magazine in Alaska, so I thought I would chime in and say hello from Texas!

So far I enjoy reading, and hope to come across more from your area! I love that I found ghost adventure stories in your magazine, one of my favorite things to read about.

I imagine that you would print this in a new issue and someone, like myself, would be pleasantly surprised that your magazine travels around! I would love to get my hands on that issue or another one some time soon.

-Wendy



## Bigfoot Smashed My Fence

Dear Weird NJ:

My wife and I live within walking distance to all major fast foods in Arlington, Washington. The other side is Jim Creek. The Jim Creek region is a highly protected naval base, operations for all Pacific submarines, etc. Jim Creek has had Bigfoot reportings since the 1950s

At times we can get deer herds on the property, and we have a salmon stream a 1/4 mile away.

In November 2017 we heard a scream/howls so loud it rattled the windows. Using common sense I did not go out looking for the origin. I went out the next day, and our fence leading to the stream had been destroyed.

I called the county sheriff to report the vandalism. I explained to the reporting officer what had happened. He said, "It appears you had a Bigfoot go through your yard!" Arlington also seems to be a hotbed for UFO sightings -Mark Stevens

## First Photo Of The Men In Black Photographed In Jersey City

Dear Weird NJ:

I would like to pass on to you the following information. I do not know if you have featured stories along these lines in earlier *Weird NJ* issues or online, as I need to catch up on YEARS of your great material. Are you aware of the famous, infamous, (only?) photograph taken of a Man in Black circa 1968 in Jersey City, N.J.? It is reproduced many places online. One of the best and earliest accounts is written by an early Saucer researcher, John J. "Jack" Robinson in front of whose home the MIB was sighted. Please look for *SAUCER NEWS*: Fall-Winter V.5 no.2 1968-1969 for the following (which is one of my favorite titles of all time): "Men in Black, Cadillacs, Doppelgangers & Laser Beams, you name it, we have it in Jersey."

At one time I saw this online, but failed to copy it. I am looking for it today again. Robinson was active in UFO and other "weird" research from the 1940s onward, and attended early National UFO Conference meetings. He was an editor for *Saucer News* and he and his wife, Mary, had unusual experiences in Jersey City and elsewhere with MIB.

Nick Redfern in his book, *The Real Men In Black* describes some of the above, and might be more readily available to view online for a quick overview.

I'm researching more about the Robinsons, and somewhere in my files I have the street address where the strange events took place. My grandparents lived not too far away in Jersey City when the MIB was spotted! I was only 7 at the time when I visited them there, but it is cool (or unnerving) to think that an MIB event took place in the same city. -Paul Grzybowski



## That's No Bigfoot Of The Cyptid Kind

Dear Weird NJ:

I'm watching the show *Paranormal Caught On Camera*. The Bigfoot they show is completely fake; it's a guy in a costume. I'm sure you know that. I'm a researcher and it's definitely not a Bigfoot. It would run away, not toward people. You can tell by the dimensions of the arms and legs. The flying humanoid thing is cool. My friend saw one about 40 years ago. He was jogging on the beach and it flew right in front of him and hovered.

-Larry Rippon, BFRO New Jersey

## Animal Horns Or The Devil

Dear Weird NJ:

I just finished the article "Strange Encounters in the Pine Barrens," in Issue #54. On the page 65, the picture of the cauldron, there looks to me to be a spirit of some sort, right behind the cauldron. I noticed it as soon as I turned the page. It sort of looks like an animal with horns or the devil. I go with the latter. -Jan Scelsa



## I See Pregnant Ghosts

Dear Weird NJ:

I enjoyed watching Mark Moran give an analysis on the TV show *Paranormal Caught on Camera*. It's that one clip where the baby has three scratches on his cheek and he sees some spirit walking through the room. I don't know if I am not seeing this correctly or if you have not noticed it, but the ghost (or whatever it is walking through the room) seems to be a woman who has her hand underneath her pregnant stomach. And then that baby with the three scratches, I think that the pregnant lady ghost wants that young couple and their son out of the house because she feels like they are intruding in her home. And maybe the ghost is jealous of the young couple's son getting more attention in that house than the pregnant ghost. Those are just my thoughts, so if you get a chance, watch that clip again and see if you see what I see. If you do see what I see, a reply would be nice to validate my 65-year-old eyes. But I do have a 56-inch TV, which helps those 65-year-old eyes! -Ray

## More Diversity In Weird NJ?

Dear Weird NJ:

I'm a long-time fan of the magazine. As a caucasian Polish/Italian, I keep hearing there's an increasing need for diversity in TV/movies. When I read your magazine, I don't see a lot of Blacks, Hispanics or even Indians. We're as diverse as we get in New Jersey. Is there something I'm not picking up on? -JJ

JJ: Most of our content is places to visit (and some not), abandoned sites, roadside attractions, ghosts, UFOs, unexplained phenomena and the occasional interview with folks who see an alternate reality. We think we're about as diverse as we can get. -Eds

## I See Orb People

Dear Weird NJ:

I watched an episode today of *Paranormal Caught On Camera* (Season 2, Episode 16) about the dummy head made by the Allied POW, Booth.

In the film after part of Mark's interview, there is an orb that appears on the right side of the dummy's case that travels from bottom to top on the right of the case. Very interesting and compelling evidence of some energy/entity in the area. The episode started at 6:30 and the orb appears at around 7:29.

I had to stop and rewind several times to confirm what I saw. Since it wasn't mentioned in the episode I wanted to make sure you knew. -Sheryl



## I See Mysterious Green Lights

Dear Weird NJ:

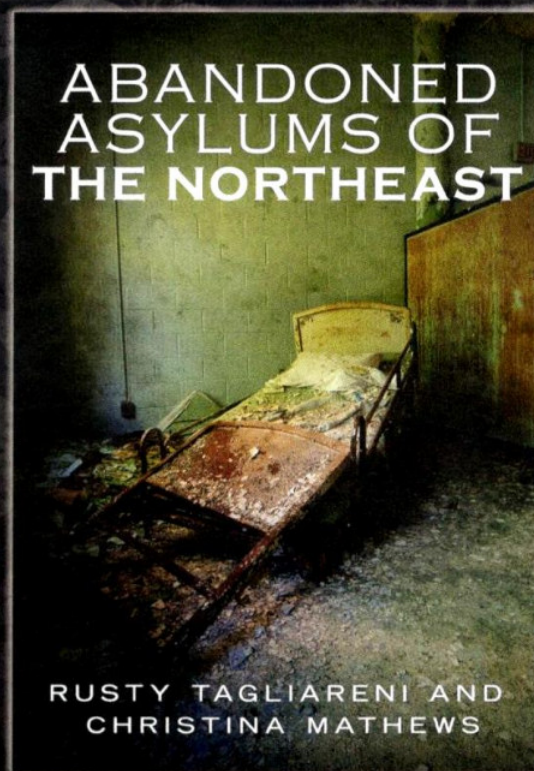
I live near a marsh by the bay in NJ. We moved here in 2011. I started noticing strange little lights at night in the marsh. I know most people would say they were lighting bugs, but I know lightning bugs, and these are not them. These lights travel across the area lit up for longer periods of time. At first my family thought I was nuts. Through the years other members of the family are starting to notice them. I also have a picture that I took that captured images of these lights. I woke up early one day and it just happened to be Halloween morning. I took the garbage out right as the sun was rising. I noticed how cool the shadows looked in the front yard. I'm that person who takes random pictures with my phone, and it being Halloween, it was a creepy cool picture to get. When my family woke up I showed them the picture. My husband asked what the green lights were in our grass. I said I didn't know. We went outside to see if anything was there, but there wasn't. We have no idea what caused the green lights.

-Heidi Maurer



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## THE PINE BOOK MOTOR LODGE'S LAST STAND



by Cheryl Ann Marino

For years the Pine Brook Motor Lodge has been an easy target to sneering, eye rolls, and rumors of unsavory goings on within its invisible courtyard confines. Its nondescript, dated frontage offered passersby only limited visibility of the motel's unique offerings like a drive-thru key pick up and drop off, efficiency apartments, a manager's den, and several oddly constructed alleyways to access its many individual courtyard-style rooms.

Given its rundown and minimally maintained appearance, it's really no wonder it stuck out like a sore thumb in a town almost entirely given over to modernization and redevelopment in the last 70 years. Some would say its exterior bore some sentimentality as not only one of the first, but also one of the last remaining original establishments on Route 46, while others would deem it as nothing more than an eyesore. It just depends on how you look at things, and it seems the popular vote was to not look at things at all—the motel (along with all its mystery) has been slated for demolition, bringing about the final end to a long and very nostalgic era.

Safe to say the iconic landmark located in the Pine Brook section of Montville Township had a good run, but all good things must come to an end. Much like the rest of its small town predecessors, the motel and surrounding land became the final casualty of redevelopment and roadway expansions, to close out the era of local originals. The good news for proponents of modernization is that the 5½-acre redevelopment plan on the land where the motel stands will basically eliminate transient housing (with associated problems), and promote a more attractive variety of shops, restaurants and retail establishments to enhance the character of the area.



The township of Montville has an interesting history. Its name was derived from the Mandeville family who in 1770 owned and operated an inn, not far from the Pine Brook section, where people would have their mail sent (rather than to their own homes). Another historical attraction in the township is the Morris Canal, which in the 1800s carted coal from Pennsylvania to New Jersey iron industries.

To add to some of the township's little known history, in the late 1700s and early 1800s the community harvested some historic names of those born in the municipality. David Young, publisher of *The Farmer's Almanac*—one of America's oldest publications (1781) and Marietta Huntoon Crane Woodruff, who became the first female doctor in Morris County (1837) were both born in the Pine Brook section of the township.

Redevelopment along the Pine Brook highway corridor was gradual, yet inevitable with the addition of highway access ramps and chain stores, but for a number of years out-of-towners and locals enjoyed a number of popular attractions along Route 46.

### The Pine Brook Auction (1950-1971)

Back in the 1950s, there used to be what was known as the Pine Brook Auction, a permanent indoor flea market comprised of a series of booths, much like the ones today, which also featured live auctions. Most of the vendors were from Brooklyn, NY, and sold everything from clothes to costume jewelry to books and magazines. Perhaps the most popular vendor of all was "Shimmie the Pickle King" who was best remembered for his selection of pickles for sale in big barrels. His business tactic was the simple yet successful sprinkling of sawdust and pickle juice all around his assortment to attract customers.

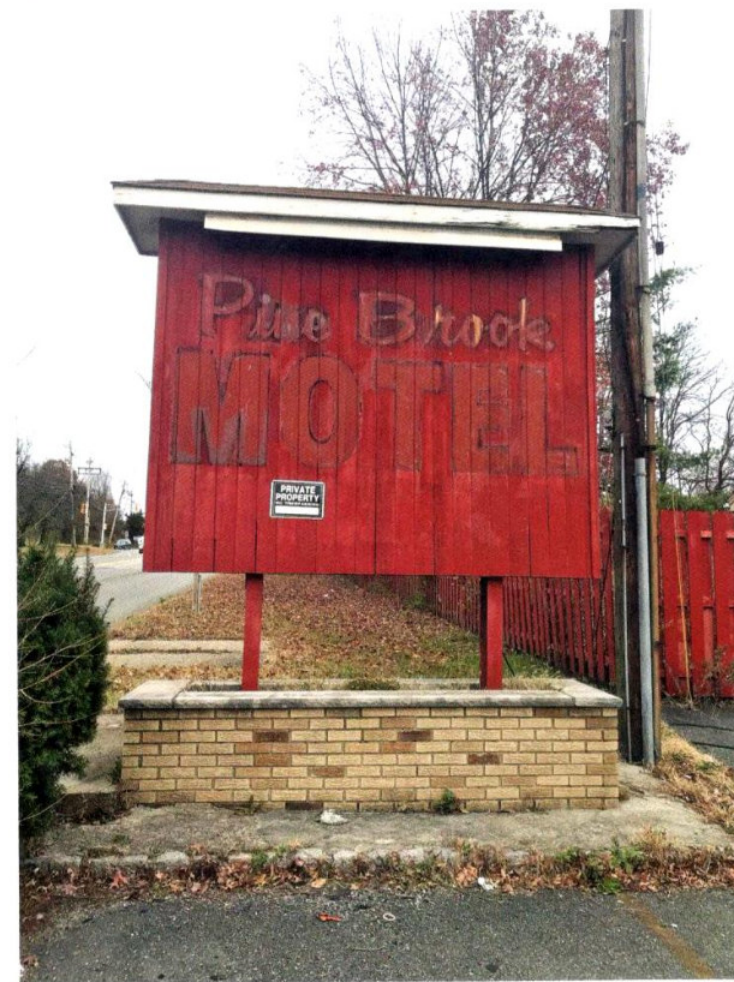
In 1971, a devastating fire broke out somewhere in the vicinity of the main auction hall, commonly known as "Jack's Action Auction," and burned out of control for nearly three hours. By the time responders arrived at the scene, flames over







In 1971, a devastating fire broke out at the Pine Brook Auction somewhere in the vicinity of the main auction hall, commonly known as "Jack's Action Auction," and burned out of control for nearly three hours.



100 feet high had engulfed the auction, and were already shooting out of the hut-style roof. Thick black smoke billowed out and around the building, causing a complete standstill on Route 46 during rush hour. According to news reports, the structure and goods weren't all that perished in the fire that day; it had also claimed the life of the auction's manager Nettie La Flesh. Her charred body was discovered many hours after the fire raged and retreated. La Flesh had worked at the auction for nearly two decades, and though it was her day off, she was called into work by the night watchman to resolve a problem early that morning, so she obliged as any good manager would. Once the problem was resolved, the watchman left and the fire began shortly after. At first it was believed that the watchman had also perished in the fire, but he was located later with an alibi at the time of the fire. Another head scratching moment in history that may never be completely understood.

According to fire officials at the time, this was the second fire at the auction. The first, in 1959, caused much destruction, but the place was salvageable. Also, it was reported that just three weeks before the auction blaze, there was another fire at the horse ranch just 500 feet from the auction where two dozen horses burned to death, but there appeared to be no connection between the two.

### Pine Brook Stadium and Speedway (1962-1989)

Before Home Depot rolled into town, spectators paid their \$2.00 admission in 1962 to watch the debut of TQ Midget car races at the newly constructed Pine Brook Stadium near the intersection of Route 46 and Bloomfield Avenue.

Plenty of events and big names graced the stadium over the years. Montville Township held its spectacular Fourth of July fireworks display at the stadium in 1964, a one-time single flat-track motorcycle event took place there, and it was also the birthplace of Micro Stock racing. Mini-Stocks of the Foreign Compact Racing Association raced only a few times at the Pine Brook track, and Mario Andretti claimed success there early in his career, winning a race at the Pine Brook track in 1963.

The stadium concept was well received in the racing community, but the venture just didn't prove profitable for the stadium's first owner Dick Marlow, so he opted to walk away just two years after the stadium's grand opening. The American TQ Midget Racing Association took over operations for the two seasons that followed, before the Association's founder Jack Dowie and his wife Wilhelmina "Willie" partnered in managing the stadium's operations. In 1966 the Pine Brook Stadium was renamed to what many recall as the Pine Brook Speedway.

In the 1980s Jack Bellinato, a former stock car race driver (also promoter of the New Egypt Speedway), joined the Dowies in a partnership and ran the speedway for its duration of 28 summers before its closing in 1989.







The Speedway was on leased land and therefore borrowed time. It might have remained open a bit longer if the landowner had not chosen to pursue alternate (aka more profitable) options for development, or if an alternate nearby location was secured. Bellinato hoped to one day build another track, but when he died in 1992, so did the idea of another Speedway in Pine Brook.

### Kiddie Karnival (Kiddie Land 1953-1987)

Not far from Wetson's Hamburger stand, a miniature golf course, and a Polynesian restaurant, was a small (not so small if you were a kid) amusement park at the intersection of Route 46 and Hook Mountain Road. Don't waste your time looking for any remnants; it's now a Wendy's parking lot.

Kiddie Karnival or "Kiddie Land," as it was more commonly known, operated from the 1950s until operations ceased in 1987. Many of the locals who once took a spin on the park's classic rides as a kid ended up working there in their teen years or at least knew someone who worked there.

The park featured a kiddie coaster, old whip, small-scale circular revolving motorcycle, helicopter and boat rides, a small Ferris wheel, and mini speedway rides for .50 cents, to name only a few. For northern New Jersey natives, it was a sampling of South Jersey and the benefit of boardwalk amusements, minus the actual beach.

Kiddie Land was purely family owned and operated from the day the first ticket was taken until the tiny roller coaster took its last lap. Anna and Joseph Sarnelle from Brooklyn, NY opened Kiddie Land in the 1950s at its original location just a bit further down on Route 46, closer to the auction. They rented



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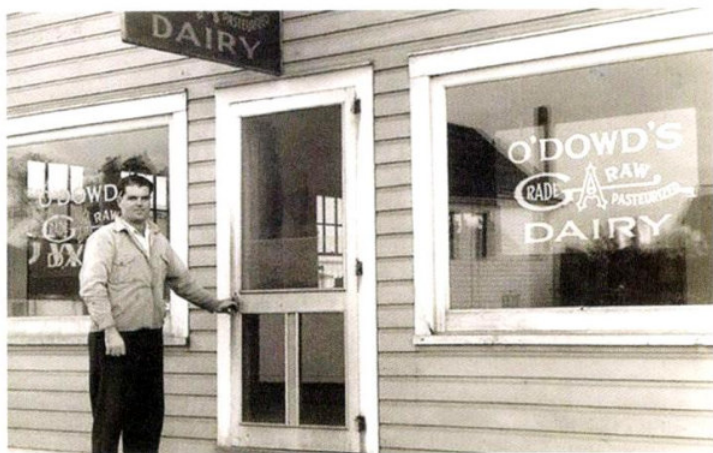
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the land from O'Dowd's Dairy, until the popular ice cream venue wanted to sell the property, so the Sarnelles and their sons physically relocated the park, its rides, and all contents to its new location and final destination near Hook Mountain Road.

Today a wide variety of choices are available in the kiddie entertainment arena, but back when there were only about six television channels and no video games, options were pretty limited. A short ride to a local amusement park on any given night of the week never required any arm-twisting, and I can say from personal experience that Kiddie Land was most definitely the place to be in the 1970s.

The park permanently closed to make way for a road project, but its iconic memory of colorful spinning rides, wall-to-wall crowds, lights, bells and the invigorating sound of ride-induced screaming will definitely live on forever.





## O'Dowd's Dairy/Milk Bar and Restaurant (1904 - 1981)

Before the golden arches and "two all-beef patties" there was O'Dowd's Dairy, known for its milk machines and "best ice cream cones around." O'Dowd's might actually be the oldest of the originals, dating operations back to 1904, when the business made its very first milk delivery. Even if you weren't from Pine Brook, but visited the area on occasion, the popular ice cream parlor was most definitely the hub of all the other Route 46 amusements. The dairy didn't just run an ice cream business; the O'Dowd family also owned much of the land along the strip of Route 46 and leased it to the other establishments.

Today, there's a McDonald's and Burlington Coat Factory where once upon a time there was a bowling alley, penny arcade, batting cages, a roadside fruit stand, and a Par 3 golf course with driving range that featured fully lighted night golf on the same lot of land as O'Dowd's. It's possible the fruit stand outlasted all the other establishments, or maybe no one saw the benefit of developing the small lot, which still includes what looks to be the original signpost.

O'Dowd's and the processing and bottling plant behind the ice cream parlor were destroyed by fire in 1981, but the O'Dowd family continues to prosper in the Pine Brook area with an advertising business on Route 46.

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## Rich's HobbyTowne (1950s - early 1980s)

If glow-in-the-dark Aurora monster models and remote control toys and accessories were your thing back in the 1950s through the 1970s, Rich's HobbyTowne was the place.

Owner Rich Palmer started a small shop in Boonton located not far from the train station. As business grew, so did the need to relocate to a much larger place on Route 46 in Parsippany with enough land for a "Tri-O-Rama Field" (aka an area to try out various remote control items). That location lasted for a while, but it's unclear as to whether the hobby shop had to move due to road expansion or the addition of a Holiday Inn, but either way Rich once again needed to move.

In the early 1970s the perfect location was found at an old, somewhat spooky looking, former church perched on a hill just off of Route 46 at the corner of Hook Mountain Road in Pine Brook. The new dimly lit venue seemed an even more appropriate place for the store to stock its famous monster models and kits. Kids (and model kit enthusiasts of all ages) were treated to the full thrill effect of entering what looked like a haunted house, complete with a set of creaky old wooden steps leading up the church tower to the room where all the models were kept.

Rich's business became so popular he was noted by *Amazing Figure Modeler Magazine* as the nation's largest-volume hobby shop at the time, and in 1964, he was selected by Aurora Plastics to organize a Monster Customizing Contest. The contest, the hobby shop, and Aurora plastics captured the attention of Walter Cronkite, anchor of CBS Evening News, who could not resist an interview with Rich in the "Monster Corner" portion of the shop.

In the early 1980s arcades were gaining popularity with the younger generation and monster model kits gave way to video games and pinball. With no choice but to succumb to current trends, Rich closed HobbyTowne. Little did he know that after two years of sitting vacant, the old church would reopen as what else but a video arcade.

For three decades Rich's HobbyTowne was an iconic local household name for not only where to purchase model kits and remote control toys, but also a must-visit hobby shop for the whole experience.



Rich Palmer, owner of Rich's HobbyTowne in the Monster Corner.





Game Town (early 1980s -mid 1990s)

If you build an arcade, the teenagers will come. And surely they did, from townships near and far. In the 1980s anyone with three-way calling or a pager had gotten the word out about Game Town, and it soon earned its reputation as the coolest place around.

Open daily from 12:00PM-12:00AM, Game Town wasn't just an arcade featuring everything from Pac-Man to pinball—it was also a hotspot for teenagers to meet up, socialize and figure out where to go next.

On the outside, its church-like exterior (which didn't change much at all from when it had been Rich's HobbyTowne) presented a unique appeal. On the inside, the dark multi-level cavernous appearance, high ceilings and planetary artwork offered otherworldly ambiance. Of course the experience was combined with the all too painful reality of having to actually pay (for tokens) to play the games. At the time, paying for games didn't really matter when weighing the limited options for teens on a given Friday night; we were armed with cash and prepared to pay. If the word on the street was a gathering place to hang out with friends that didn't require ID, we were there.

Who could possibly resist the space age video game sounds, bells, and whistles from the beginning of your game playing experience until the end?

The arcade also offered birthday parties downstairs in the "party room" and games were free for party guests for as long as the room was booked—for a teenager in the 1980s, being invited to one of these was like the equivalent of hitting the lottery.

A little over a decade later came the emergence of home gaming systems, so it was lights out for Game Town. The old church would once again undergo renovation and see a new and completely different type of establishment—a swanky eclectic Italian restaurant called Milan with live music, a DJ, an extensive international wine list and patio dining. Milan closed in 2008, and the old church that saw such a diverse assortment of businesses over the years remained empty for two years before the building was entirely bulldozed in 2010.

If you look at the Pine Brook stretch of Route 46 now chock full of retail stores, restaurants, and car dealerships, it's hard to imagine that it was once

If you look at the Pine Brook stretch of Route 46 now chock full of retail stores, restaurants, and car dealerships, it's hard to imagine that it was once a playground of good old fashioned fun and family entertainment. Even though today there are plenty of other options for places to go and things to do, some might say amusements like these probably wouldn't survive, but I'm not entirely sure that's true.

a playground of good old fashioned fun and family entertainment. Even though today there are plenty of other options for places to go and things to do, some might say amusements like these probably wouldn't survive, but I'm not entirely sure that's true. There seems to be a trending desire for a return to the simpler things again, so it's too bad not even one of these former establishments/amusements remains.

So a final farewell and respectful RIP to the Pine Brook Motor Lodge (1946-2020)—what went on behind your courtyard walls, stays there. Forever. But you will always be remembered for standing your ground all those years, and serving to remind us that even though decades have passed and things have surely changed, Pine Brook's original landscape was a local treasure in its time, anchored with a very distinctive history that will be remembered always.

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The elite (and exhausted) squad of Tidal Wave Pool lifeguards. Andy Mulvihill is the first guy on the left in the second row from the top. Photo courtesy of Andy Mulvihill.

by Joanne M. Austin

*Action Park is one of the most enduring weird locations from the Weird NJ pages, and a place we were likely to be the first to write about extensively in 2005. People still can't get enough of this notorious amusement park that was nestled in the Vernon Township, NJ mountains from the late 1970s until 1996. We've seen its story told on websites, in viral videos, used as a source for the movie, Action Point, and more recently in the documentary, Class Action Park. And now Action Park is getting the family treatment, with the book, Action Park: Fast Times, Wild Rides, and the Untold Story of America's Most Dangerous Amusement Park. In it, Andy Mulvihill and Jake Rossen tell the tale of the visionary and crazy amusement park that Andy's dad, Gene Mulvihill, created. Andy—the first person to make it through the Cannonball Loop—spoke with Weird NJ in July 2020.*

**Joanne Austin: Action Park is a legend that *Weird NJ* has covered. It's one of the most popular stories on our website and something that's evergreen. Because of that, I know our readers would love to read your book. Why is it out now after all these years?**

Andy Mulvihill: Well, everyone's got an Action Park story. My family and friends and I have hundreds of them. We tell them to each other all the time, and we laugh. It just seemed like it was a shame not to capture them because we really had the inside scoop. But I saw [Johnny] Knoxville was doing a movie that was inspired by Action Park. I said to myself, Andy, look, somebody's making a movie already. Get off your ass. I'm usually kind of systematic in the way I approach things but in this one case I jumped right in. I did a little research to figure out real quick I had to find a writer. So I then said, well, who want you to get to write it? And I figured maybe some of the guys who interviewed me in the past where I liked their work. So I found this guy, Jake Rossen. I got along with him and we agreed to do a book pitch together, which we circulated to the publishers. We were picked up by Penguin Random House. We made a deal and it took about two years to do it. We interviewed around 100 people. I had a list of all the stories I wanted to put in, and certain themes and lessons. I really wanted to write a book about my father and

**"Everyone's got an Action Park story. My family and friends and I have hundreds of them."**

## ALL IN THE ACTION PARK FAMILY: ANDY MULVIHILL

Action Park. But the editors asked me to write from the perspective of a young guy coming of age. They're all fun stories. I think people have enjoyed it. The feedback has been phenomenal.

**Are there any misconceptions about Action Park that you want to clarify? Things that maybe we've told or other publications or websites have shared over the years that you just want to say, "No, that's not right. This is really what happened."**

There's all sorts of stuff that's been reported—the list is very long—that is inaccurate, but it's not like I wrote the book because I needed to straighten things out. I wrote it because I wanted people to hear some of these really epic stories. I wanted them to get a glimpse of a creative genius: my father. And I wanted them to understand why a guy would build a place where people could get hurt.

On the face of it when you say, "A guy built a place where people could get hurt," it sounds terrible. But these little ski areas are all over the country and people can get hurt there. People go swimming at the Jersey Shore every summer and I think in 2017 there were around 37 water-related deaths. Should we shut the Jersey Shore down? My dad wanted to create a place that looked thrilling and where there were certain risks involved. You can go to the bunny hill and go skiing and be real careful and not get hurt. Or if you want a real thrill you go up to the top and ski fast, go down moguls and through trees. It's an awful lot of fun but there are risks. My father was okay with that. He was okay with people taking risks to have a real lot of fun.

**So it's not about your clearing things up so much as it is explaining what happened there from your family's perspective. One of the things that I first saw in the book is the Bailey Ball (a giant ball within a ball ride that was supposed to carry one person at a time as it rolled along a track). I'm not surprised it never became a ride at the park. How did it come about?**

It was very early on. And I only observed a little bit of it. Frankly, we take a little poetic license on how much I was involved [with it] in writing the book. But I know that dad wanted it all from the background of ride manufacturing. He was a new inventor, Ken Bailey, he was Canadian. He designed and built the Aqua Scoot, which was there for many years as a ride. I don't know how many of those he sold to others. But the Bailey Ball, I don't really understand

# Action Park



why we didn't stay with it. I mean, the fact that it was a ball holding a person going one at a time down a track, I mean, that [ride] volume is nothing...that's stacked against you. And the fact that you got into this ball that probably, if it ran perfectly, you would stay upright, because you're in a seat in a ball that's in a ball. It doesn't work right if you spin all around, like in a gyro?

Yes.

That would make you sick to your stomach. So I can't imagine that was a real fun experience. But the fact that Bailey built it with PVC pipe that fell apart, it showed that he didn't know what he was doing at all. The track literally fell apart because it got really hot that day. So I speculate it was just an ill-conceived notion. But Gene was willing to give anything a shot and if it didn't work out we just moved on to the next thing, and that's kind of a lesson in life to try things. You realize you're going to fail. Okay, I'll try the next thing and you might try 10 things and only two work but those two might be great and make the difference.

**The ball was supposed to stay on a track and it was also supposed to stop on its own because there were no brakes. That's the thing about this ball that still kind of amazes me: there was no way internally for the person that was in it to control stopping.**

The track was supposed to level off and maybe even go uphill a little bit for it to stop.

**Gotcha. So if the track didn't melt, it probably would have worked fine. (Eds. - In its test run it broke free from the track, rolled down the mountain out onto Route 94, and landed in a small lake in Motor World—with a person in it.)**

Yeah, but then you had to get the ball back up the mountain. And how are you going to get any volume so people enjoy it? There were a lot of challenges associated with that thing. And frankly, it was so early on I was not very involved at that time. I was a young kid. Wish I could give you more than I have.

**Your whole family took an active role in working at the park and in one of your earlier roles you were the head lifeguard at the Wave Pool. What was that like?**

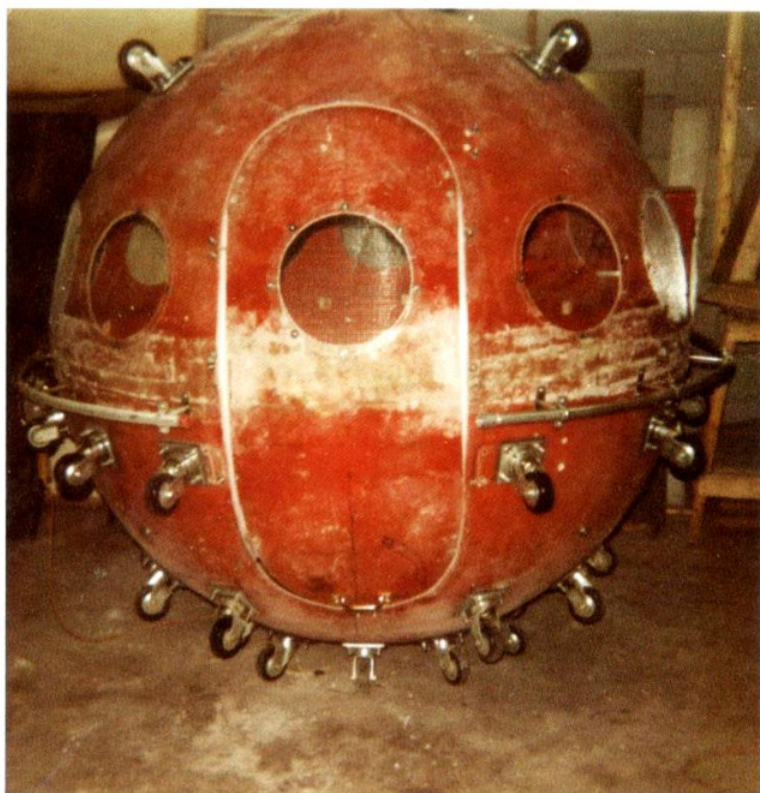
It was the second Wave Pool built in the country or maybe one of the first. Whenever my dad would buy a ride that'd been built by somebody else he'd always tell them he wanted the biggest and the best...the craziest. I'm sure they suped up the fans to produce bigger waves than anybody else. But it was built and it's a pool with waves, and where's the operating manual? There's really not an operating manual. People go swimming in the pool with waves. And the only thing we could really adjust was the amount of time the waves were off and on.

We opened the thing the first weekend and by the end of the weekend, I looked at my team of lifeguards and they were in a state of shock. They were all exhausted. Some of them were in tears. Usually a lifeguard makes one or two saves in a whole summer. Each of these lifeguards made 30 saves over the weekend, maybe even more. And it was a lot of responsibility. It was a real challenge. I don't know that anybody quit, maybe one or two quit, but most of them stayed with it. They were the Special Forces lifeguards of the park, the gladiators. They even had Wave Patrol jackets made. They were the varsity team.

We worked really hard to try to make that thing safe. We were very successful for a number of years, until we had a tragedy. But then it was like going to battle. People would go down, left and right. You'd be watching one and save them, and then another would go down. And then we would turn the waves off whenever there was a drowning, but then we got to be such good lifeguards that we didn't need to turn the waves off because the waves would be off the whole time with all the drownings that there were.

But we learned certain techniques to try to reduce [drownings], like you would spot people as they were going from the shallower to the deeper end that you could just tell from experience, they did not look comfortable in the water. You'd blow your whistle say, "Hey, be careful there!" and it would give them pause. That was effective. We had rafts and tubes and that was a mixed bag because it would help if they would hold on to them. But they'd go out where they shouldn't and let go, and they'd go under. We also let people jump in from the side. We allowed that throughout. When the new guys came in,

**My dad wanted to create a place that looked thrilling and where there were certain risks involved. You can go to the bunny hill and go skiing and be real careful and not get hurt. Or if you want a real thrill you go up to the top and ski fast, go down moguls and through trees. It's an awful lot of fun but there are risks. My father was okay with that. He was okay with people taking risks to have a real lot of fun.**



Undersea exploration vessel? No, a prototype of the Bailey Ball—a ride that never made it to prime time, but did roll down to Route 94 and beyond. Photo courtesy of Andy Mulvihill.

they did not allow that. I think they made the pool less deep, too.

**One thing that comes up in the book over and over again is the way that people treated Action Park as a place where the rules didn't apply. Why do you think that was?**

Because they'd never seen a place like that before, an amusement park where a guy built a huge grotto with cliffs and you could jump in from wherever you wanted. Initially, there were absolutely no rails around the big pool at Roaring Springs. My father built it and I said, "You can't just let people jump in wherever they want."

[Paraphrasing Gene] "No they won't jump on each other. When I was up at the quarry, there were no lifeguards, and the kids didn't jump on each other's heads."

I said, "Yeah, but this is a packed place with New Yorkers and they're crazy."

We got him to compromise and put some rails up in certain areas, but generally, he just wanted people...he didn't want to restrict them. He was the guy who, when he was growing up, he didn't like people telling him what to do. He was—I don't know if "free spirit" is the right word—but he was a guy who really liked to experience the world. And he wanted to give people that freedom. The fact that you could go up a chairlift and get on a toboggan and go down as fast as you wanted? People said, "I can really do this? They let me do this?" It just overwhelmed them. They couldn't believe it.

Some people were reckless about it and they didn't take it seriously and they ended up maybe injuring themselves. There also were people that probably were products of the—what is the expression? Of the mother state or the father state. Everything is controlled for you. No matter what you do, everything's controlled. So oh, an amusement park, I can't get hurt because Big Brother is looking after me, the state is looking after me, but that wasn't the case for Action Park. It was the precursor to extreme sports and the X-Games.

You've got to remember my dad was trying to figure it out himself. He was creating a unique place. The waterpark industry was very new. I mean, if I wanted to open a waterpark now, I would go to 10 different manufacturers and pick from 50 different rides, slides and such, that all have been totally engineered. None of those companies existed back then. You'd find a guy who





had a crowded campground in California. And he builds himself a waterslide out of concrete. And then he figured out to put padding on it and then started selling them around the country. My father was one of the first guys [to buy one]. And he wanted to do this participation thing, not the same old, same old. There were a lot of challenges associated with that, but with it came some majestic moments, for sure.

**You mentioned that a park like this couldn't exist outside of the New York area. But do you also think that it had a lot to do with the people of New Jersey themselves and a kind of "Jersey Pride" that exists where maybe we go to an amusement park where we get scars and can possibly get hurt but we like that and we're going to brag about that and be proud about that?**

I shouldn't say that you couldn't build this park anywhere else. Maybe you could, but you wouldn't have had the same reaction and the same results because people from New York and New Jersey are a unique breed. There's a lot of self confidence. There's a lot of bravado. There's a lot of wiseguy. There's a lot of competition. It's a melting pot of different religious and ethnic groups that sometimes rub shoulders positively and sometimes rub shoulders negatively. So it created certain tensions there. But a New Yorker, if he's having fun and you said, "Hey man, your time's up. Bring your speedboat in," there's a good chance he's going to say go fuck yourself and he's going to go around a couple more times. "Get out of my face I'm having fun."

My father was a Jersey guy; all of us kids grew up in Jersey. We get it, and we love it. We'd love to entertain the people from the area but they have Alpine Slides in other areas of the country. We put one up in Colorado and my dad had it for years, years after Action Park closed. We didn't have any injuries at those. Why did we only have injuries at Action Park on the Alpine Slide? I'm sure there were a few but not like there were here. It's because it's the crazy New York and New Jersey people. They wanted to slam into their friends that were in front them, because they could. That's the kind of crazy people we are.

**The book was really honest about the injuries, the deaths, the resulting lawsuits and some of the legal troubles that your dad had, but he still comes across as a visionary. I learned so much about him as a person. I know people who knew him and have talked about him. And it's always been positive: he was this generous guy, he just wanted people to have fun, and he was happy to see people being happy.**

I really appreciate your saying that because that's really what I wanted people...I didn't want to shy away from the tough stuff. I needed to address it because it wouldn't have been the full story and I needed people to understand why the deaths were not okay. Even if someone was completely irresponsible and that resulted in their demise. It's still not okay. I think we could have done more, though we tried our very best.

And when you take a ton of people, a small town of 15,000 people, which was a busy day at Action Park, and you go to the ER, you can see what happens when people are active. Stuff happens. I just wanted to deal with it and I wanted people to understand his perspective on it. That he did care. But it was not like he wasn't going to **not** do something because there was a risk of getting hurt. He wasn't **not** going to have a Wave Pool because someone might drown in it. It happens. People drown at the Jersey Shore all the time, and it never closes.

The best example is the Tarzan Swing. It's the simplest idea. You get on a platform, you swing out with a rope over water, you let go and drop in. There are swings like that all over America, in lakes and rivers and in swimming holes. And it was in Action Park for 20 years, and I think another 15 to 20 years thereafter. After Action Park closed, that was one of the rides that stayed. Two years ago, the state of New Jersey said we're shutting down the Tarzan Swing because it's not safe. After 40 years! Why? I'll tell you why. What was defined as safe and what was defined as tolerable has changed. Let me tell you, the Tarzan Swing if you had weak shoulders, like I have a weak shoulder from playing hockey, I used to dislocate it. You go on the Tarzan Swing and you can dislocate your shoulder if you have bad shoulders. If you had a bad back, and you landed wrong, you definitely could hurt your back. And if you were perfectly fine, you might be one out of 10,000 people to get hurt for no reason at all. Does that mean that no one should be able to swing on a rope and drop into the water because that stuff happened? The state of New Jersey thinks so now, but I certainly don't. Where are we these days when you can't swing on a rope into water? Too dangerous. It's baloney.

**Your sister Julie ran the marketing operations for Action Park and she was responsible for a lot of the early publicity that led to it becoming the legend it became, including the original TV ad. I remember seeing it gazillion times when I was a kid. And this quote from the book is very telling about the whole experience that was Action Park. It's where you write, "A horrible realization came over me. The Wave Pool's occupants had taken on a collective stupid consciousness, one that paid no mind to the threat of drowning. The commercial had sterilized the park. Nothing on television could be**





Andy's parents, Gail and Gene Mulvihill, celebrating at an Oktoberfest on the grounds. Photo courtesy of Andy Mulvihill.

**hazardous. Nothing could happen to them." From the research I've done, I have to agree completely with that being the attitude some people brought into the park with them.**

Yeah, I think I alluded to this earlier. There were those people who figured "I'm in an amusement park, I can't get hurt." And who didn't really realize what was going on. No matter how many times you said, "You can't go in here unless you're an expert swimmer." Oh, yeah, fuck you, I'm an expert swimmer. Or, "You can get a burn. Look at this picture, see this burn on this person's leg from the slide?" Right. Whatever. There were a number of people with mindsets like that. And it did not serve them well. But I think the majority of people figured out real quick what they were getting into.

I don't know that the commercial necessarily said, "Don't worry, you can come up here and do all this crazy stuff and not get hurt." I think what the commercial did achieve is it got our attendance to go through the roof. When we started running it, it was like we flipped a switch. And my sister, that's the first commercial they made, they had no budget. She wrote her own script. We just talked a lot as a family about what it should be like. My dad had a lot of input. And she hired some guy to shoot the footage, someone else to make the song. We couldn't afford normal editing time, so she'd go edit the thing at two o'clock in the morning in an editing booth, and lo and behold, she really did a tremendous job. And the commercials became really well known.

**Another thing that I pulled from the book was scars being kind of a viral marketing campaign. That's something that always comes up when people share their Action Park stories with *Weird NJ*. It's always, "I got this scar.**

**They got that scar. We're comparing our scars." And there's no place else where that's even a thing. And I think that's great.**

Absolutely. It was the Action Park tattoo. My dad was giving out tattoos to kids before it became popular, but I imagine that this conversation has happened probably hundreds of times where somebody has said, "I went to Action Park. Check out my scar!" And someone else goes, "You've got one? Check out my scar!" I'm sure it happens all the time.

**It wouldn't surprise me at all.**

Hey, people from New Jersey and not the most glamorous people...We don't mind a scar or two. We think it shows character. I mean, all the gangsters are from New Jersey in the movies, right?

**Yes. I think people sometimes tried to tie the Mafia into the area and it's made very clear that there's only that one connection with a friend of your dad's, who was the stepson of Abner "Longie" Zwillman.**

That's John Steinbach. My father met him when he was 10 years old. They went to school together. And my grandfather, my father's father, he was a pretty live-and-let-live guy, he didn't like... A lot of people would stay away from the Steinbach family. Well, the Zwillman family: John's mother had John and then got divorced and married Zwillman. But my father would be over their house. And he was very tight with John. And John's father died when John was a relatively young man, in his early 20s. So John never got involved in the "business." And Zwillman said that he would not give John his last name, and it would be the best thing he could ever do for him. But anyway, Gene kind of looked after John for many years, he'd give him jobs.

John was proud of his stepfather and that heritage a little bit. My father played with that and probably was his own worst enemy when it came to rumors about the mob. People would say, "Oh, John Steinbach's father was Zwillman." And Gene would say, "Yeah, he is. His father was that guy. So watch out." He'd do anything for a laugh, anything to prod somebody. He was not a guy who cared too much if someone thought he might have a gangster connection. If people wanted to make stuff up, go ahead, "I don't care, stay out of my face. I'm gonna go spend time with good people." All the people who were detractors, rumormongers, the people who wrote scathing articles, it didn't faze him. He'd just ignore it.

**Are there things in the works outside of the book—like a TV show—that people can look forward to seeing at some point in the future?**

When we wrote the book, it was coming along very well. And my literary agent said, "Hey, let's shop this to Hollywood." And when the book was almost done, we started the process. It was really quiet for two months, and then all of a sudden we got an offer. And then we got another offer. I got 10 offers from 10 different studios that were dying to make either a movie or TV series. There was a bidding war. And ultimately, we ended up doing a deal with 20th Century Fox Television, who teamed up with Hulu as distributor. They are both Disney companies and there are a lot mentions of Disney in the book because my dad really respected the Disney company.

**I noticed.**

He held them as the gold standard of operators. So I think it's pretty cool that I can say, "Hey, it looks like we're going to have your story on the big screen in the form of a TV series by Disney." I think he'd get a chuckle out of that. We should probably have something to look forward to a couple of years from now. And they're going to have me on as a consultant. Hopefully it'll be a good time. They're going to own the rights and tell the story however they want, but the story is rich enough, and there's enough meat there, so I think they're going to want to use what the story is.

**I agree. That's something people can look forward to seeing...after they've bought and read the book, of course.**

Yes, after they've bought and read the book! They can get it online, at any of the major bookstores, and [www.actionparkbook.com](http://www.actionparkbook.com). There's some merchandise too that they can get, like t-shirts and mugs. There's stuff that was cut out of the book in there, and pictures that were not in it.

**Thanks for talking with *Weird NJ*, Andy!**

# Action Park



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## THE STORY OF ALPINE EDDIE

July 8, 1980: Action Park was in full operation, the afternoon weather was hot and work continued on the third track of the Alpine Slide. Thunderstorms were in the area, and even though they were getting close it didn't seem to matter—morale was high and we were determined to finish.

No one expected what happened next—the mother of all thunderstorms was upon us. The skies opened up, torrential rain fell and lightning bolts landed around us as if they were being aimed at us. We were in a serious situation where someone could get struck by lightning. Twenty guys climbed in one old truck that had bald tires and a propensity for its transmission to pop out of gear. Going back down the mountain in that overloaded truck in slippery mud wasn't my idea of a safe situation, but they say hindsight is 20/20. I would have been better off in the truck.

It was suggested that some of us take the Alpine Slide down to the base. I grabbed a cart and unbeknownst to me headed to my destiny. Two or three inches of water was collecting in the track but everything seemed fine, otherwise. Any of you who have ridden the Action Park Alpine Slide are familiar with the 10 foot drop after going under the bridge for the third track. Gravity came into play, and my speed was increasing. I tried to slow down but my brakes weren't working (Alpine Slide carts had no brakes on wet tracks, a minor detail that was kept secret). I went into the drop and lost my sled! Suddenly I was in a water slide getting tossed violently from one turn into another and quite scared at this point. I thought, "I've got to slow down."

As I careened down the Alpine/Water Slide, the only option to decrease my

speed was to try and catch some dirt by sticking my leg over the side of the track. Going as fast as I was, G-force and speed were not helping my plan to drop anchor. By the time I got out of one turn there was little time to get my leg over the side—so little in fact, my leg was out just in time to catch the 45 degree start of another banked turn. I remember hitting that banked turn and getting launched. I blacked out almost immediately; eyewitnesses saw me fly 30 feet and land on another track. I continued sliding about 40 yards further down the track, unconscious.

When I came to I got up and started walking as if nothing happened. A friend who was approaching me told me I had better sit down because I was hurt. I was in shock and not sure what was going on just yet. I sat down

per his request like nothing happened, with more of the guys gathering around and the Action Park EMT Crew on their way.

I vaguely remember leaving the site where I came to a stop, and my next recollection is waking up on the operating table when the anesthesia wore off and clench-



ing my butt from a staple being inserted, the doctor calmly saying, "Almost done." Hundreds of stitches and 50 staples is what it took to repair the wound that almost took off my right butt cheek—that and eight days in the hospital on my backside!

I was told later that the track section I crashed into was shattered and had to be replaced. The guys repairing the track even made me a headstone out of the section that broke that said: Here Lies Alpine Eddie. I no longer have the headstone, just a scar and a piece of that asbestos and concrete track in my leg that the doctor missed. I'll never forget that day I cheated death, or the moniker Alpine Eddie given to me by those who were there that day.

—Ed King





## History Is in Plane Sight at the Greenwood Lake Airport

by Cheryl Ann Marino

An airport by any other name is still an airport; but the New Jersey Connie at Greenwood Lake Airport is not just another airplane.

Aviation enthusiasts have always known just what's in a name when it comes to the Lockheed Constellation or "Connie," but for those of us who don't, it's a propeller-driven, four-engine airliner that was built by the Lockheed Corporation between 1943 and 1958. The Lockheed Connie, which included as many as 856 different models, was used for both military and civilian transport, and was the first airplane series with a pressurized cabin to go into widespread use.

So, given its age and history you'd think all Connies would be long gone at this point. Not true. Somehow one ended up at the Greenwood Lake Airport, but not to serve as a functioning aircraft; in fact, the owner had an entirely different purpose in mind, and one you might not expect.

When you first approach the airport's entrance, the Connie is unmistakable. It looks like any other decent-sized aircraft, only this one is a bit removed from the runway and surprisingly close to a structure. It's impossible not to notice its wingspan hovering across a section of the parking lot, and a large wrap-around deck protruding from its front half. A short walk underneath its massive underbelly reveals a tail end that's not just close, but actually attached to the airport's main building.

It's bewildering for sure. If you don't know the backstory the phenomenon might seem a bit unusual, but then again, the airport's Connie is not your usual airplane. Her extensive lifecycle history began as a military aircraft and ended as a museum — how many airplanes can say the same?

It all began in 1939 when Lockheed's Constellation design was complete, and Howard Hughes set his sights on acquiring the first 40 for TWA. Hughes hoped to have an exclusive on these for at least a couple of years before another carrier jumped on the bandwagon, but as it turned out, the military ended up commandeering the Connies at the start of World War II.

TWA would have to wait until the war's end, in 1945, to purchase the majority of the military's Connie C-69 models that Lockheed converted to L-049 specs. Around the same time, Air France also acquired four of them (the one currently stationed at the airport and three sister models).

When Air France upgraded their fleet in the early 1950s, TWA had the opportunity to buy the four remaining L-049 Connies, which were sent back to Lockheed and modified to TWA standards. After they were brought up to spec with several more windows in the fuselage and additional seating, the aircrafts were christened with a fresh coat of red and white paint and TWA flew them for nearly a decade before they were sold.

During the 1960s, ownership of what would be West Milford's Connie was shuffled from one small airline to the next including Worldwide Airlines and Royal Air Burundi. In 1968, she was purchased by Mineral County Airlines and initially flew under the Hawthorne Nevada Airlines name (renamed Air Nevada

in 1969) before the airline folded.

West Milford's L-049 managed to outlast her three Air France sister ships (which were scrapped between 1964 and 1970) and remained in storage on the West Coast for the next seven years awaiting a new buyer.

Frank Lembo Enterprises, owner of the Greenwood Lake Airport at the time, was that buyer. In 1976 he purchased the aircraft for \$45,000 with the vision that it be used as a trendy cocktail lounge. The former military-turned-civilian aircraft was serviced for the last time in 1977 and prepared for her final journey bound for New Jersey's Greenwood Lake Airport. Once she arrived in West Milford, she would never fly again; after touching ground on the airport's then 2,700-ft runway, the Connie was anchored into place against the main building and has remained there ever since.

Before the unique cocktail lounge concept was realized, the interior had to be completely reconfigured, and the aircraft transformed from a passenger plane to an intimate lounge style setting. The layout featured an arrangement of tiny tables with lanterns and menu offerings that included dinner (provided by the banquet hall/restaurant in the main building) and cocktails. Additionally, to accommodate patrons, larger doorways were cut into the fuselage, stairway access was added, and the dining configuration ensured window seating for practically all. By 1981 the redesigned Connie was ready to receive guests and was groomed for grand opening — her first mission as a permanently ground-eared aircraft.

The cocktail lounge opened, but only for a short time. Unfortunately, its debut was about five years too late; the closing of its crowd-drawing neighbor Jungle Habitat theme park impacted business significantly. Without a steady flow of theme park traffic the restaurant failed to attract customers, and sadly, the Connie's first mission was aborted after only two years.

So after such a huge undertaking, not to mention financial investment and high hopes, the Connie's obvious airport presence then posed the question of 'now what?' For







the next 15 years she remained vacant, but perfectly capable of taking on two more minor missions. Pilots used the roomy grounded structure as a workshop for a while, but that didn't last long, as the steps made accessibility limited and inconvenient for hauling heavy equipment. So once again the plane was closed but worked rather well as a storage facility.

The Connie was part of the package when the State of New Jersey bought the Greenwood Lake Airport in 2000, but it wouldn't be for another five years before the airliner would receive the all clear for its fourth mission: a flight school.

Sky Training (a Part 141 FAA approved flight school), owned and operated by the airport's manager Tim Wagner, serves students interested in obtaining their private pilot license or anyone just wanting an air tour or scenic ride around the area. Wagner said throughout the years he has employed many West Milford High School graduates, many of whom decided to pursue aviation as their career path.

When Wagner became the airport's manager in 2004, he realized the Connie was in need of some TLC and designated \$40,000 for renovations to the interior and exterior, breathing new life back into the neglected Lockheed. An



observation deck was also added for visitors to observe airport activity with an unobstructed view.

Now at long last, the Connie has settled into her retirement as a multi-use museum, which features a fully restored cockpit, some interesting old articles, photographs, and memorabilia about the plane's colorful history. She really would have made a great cocktail lounge, but she also seems to be performing pretty well as a walk-through museum.

Though the Connie's list of lifetime achievements is extensive, she's perhaps most lauded for being the first to conceptualize the cocktail lounge model. This year, the TWA Hotel at JFK Airport will be rolling out the same idea on a much larger scale with their version of a Connie cocktail lounge. The TWA Hotel's Connie (a 1956 L-1649 Starliner) is one of the final civilian variations of the plane, while Greenwood Lake Airport's was among the first.

The Connie is obviously the main attraction at the Greenwood Lake Airport, but there's something else a bit strange that you may or may not notice on the way in — a lone headstone just off to the right that belongs to someone named Harold E. "Hal" Botsford Jr. (December 13, 1925 – February 27, 2005), the front includes an etching of his likeness, with more inscriptions on the back just below a picture of a flying eagle.

This piqued my interest, since after all, it's not every day you see such a thing at an airport. While it's assumed that anything resembling a headstone in a public place is nothing more than a memorial, apparently, this is not entirely the case with Hal. It's said that he was cremated, and his ashes are actually entombed with his memorial marker in the parking lot of the airport. If that's true, it would make sense since after all, he died there.

Based on the headstone engravings, I guessed Hal was an interesting guy with a long career in aviation, and after a little research, I learned that I was right. It seems Hal was no stranger to the tarmac. He's flown airplanes since he was 16 years old and his experience in flight was as vast as the airport's Connie. According to his obituary, he "ferried mail and supplies in the Alaskan bush, logged airline time in the United States, accumulating 26,808 prop and corporate jet hours in the skies throughout six continents, and visited 145 countries around the world." I guess you could say, Hal lived — and died — in flight. His obituary continues that he "wished to be an eagle so he could soar and soar," which completely explains the wording on his airport memorial marker.

Hal was a long-time instructor at the airport and was killed along with another pilot when their single-engine, 1975 Cessna 182P malfunctioned, slammed to the ground and burst into flames shortly after takeoff. It's not known who was piloting the plane, as the airport has no control tower. Police reports indicated that the plane broke into several pieces on impact and was burned beyond recognition.

Hal's headstone might be the only one at the Greenwood Lake Airport, but his wasn't the only plane to crash there. Several other plane crashes in the vicinity of the airport over the years have raised some scrutiny about Greenwood Lake being a 'difficult and dangerous' airport. Mainly, its high elevation surrounded by hills and trees has presented some wind shear challenges for pilots taking off and landing.

Wagner has made strides in changing all that. To date, Greenwood Lake Airport has received over \$2.5 million toward improved security, safety, and







infrastructure. According to Wagner, through improvements in the infrastructure of the airport, community involvement and special events, the airport has become a hot spot for West Milford. "During my time here, I have assisted state and federal agencies in identifying, requesting, and receiving state funding and federal grants," he said of the developments in recent years. "Greenwood Lake Airport puts pilots just a short ride away from the other 5,400 public-use airports in America, connecting aviators to every state in the nation."

The airport's location was of benefit in 1967, when it served as a convenient holding area for the engine of the legendary Lockheed T2V-1 SeaStar that crash-landed in a nearby swamp during a routine training mission. The non-operational engine of the SeaStar had been pulled from the wreck and airlifted to the nearby Greenwood Lake Airport, so it could then be transported to a salvage yard. The skeletal remains of the SeaStar still exist today in the woods of West Milford and have been woven into the fabric of urban exploration for many years.

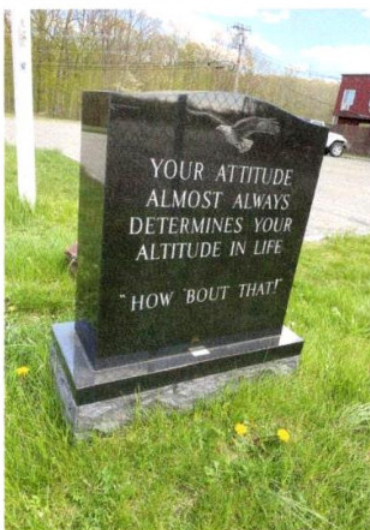
The Hackensack University Medical Center also took advantage of the airport's central site. In 2012 the hospital negotiated a long-term lease with Greenwood Lake Airport to be their base. Hackensack's AirMed1 is stationed adjacent to the main hangar to provide transportation services to the medical center, as well as affiliate hospitals. Other medivacs and state helicopters also use Greenwood Lake Airport for fueling and loading on a daily basis.

Another perk to the airport's mostly secluded 150-acre setting is a well-known annual air show featuring daredevil pilots tearing through the sky in honor of veterans, and the only aerial night show with pyrotechnics in the tri-state area. The twelfth annual air show, planned for August 13-15, 2021, is expected to be the biggest yet with an anticipated attendance topping 40,000.

In terms of unique assortment and a diverse history, it seems the Connie was a perfect fit for Greenwood Lake Airport. Between the Connie, a history, an air show, and a headstone, Greenwood Lake is definitely one of the more interesting airports, largely attributed to the challenges its faced and the innovative endurance its maintained. Wagner is looking forward to the future, though there are still many projects on his agenda yet to complete. He said that with all that has been accomplished in the past 16 years, the Greenwood Lake Airport will continue to grow and be an integral part of West Milford Township.

Seems a positive attitude and resilience is key for rising to any challenge, as Hal would say—or at least the back of his headstone—"Your attitude almost always determines your altitude in life. 'How 'bout that!'"

\*For more information about Greenwood Lake Airport visit [www.GreenwoodLakeAirport.com](http://www.GreenwoodLakeAirport.com) or [www.GreenwoodLakeAirShow.com](http://www.GreenwoodLakeAirShow.com) to learn more about the air show.







## LOST HIGHWAY: THE TRI-BOROUGH ROAD BRIDGE



Sometimes the weird sites in New Jersey can be found hidden in plain sight. Such is the case with one particular bridge to nowhere which straddles the border of Morris and Essex Counties. Hundreds, if not thousands, of motorists speed beneath it on their daily commute each day along Route 24. But how many of them take the time to glance up and wonder where this seemingly ordinary looking overpass might lead? It would no doubt come as a surprise to many of them that the roadway that the bridge carries actually doesn't go anywhere at all!

The Tri-Borough Road Bridge (not to be confused with the Triborough, a.k.a. Robert F. Kennedy Bridge in NYC) was constructed in 1974 as part of a cloverleaf interchange over Route 24. It was a project designed to connect Route 24 to Route 280 via an extension of Eisenhower Parkway through the three boroughs of Livingston, Florham Park and Chatham. But after the bridge was built and the cloverleaf excavated, no roads were ever constructed to connect them to anything. Which is probably for the best, since the intended route would have traversed and most likely destroyed an expansive area of ecologically sensitive wetlands.

So how does one get to this lost byway in the wild? The answer to that question is "not easily." The only way to access the bridge is by hiking to it from either the Chatham side to the southwest, or the Florham Park/Livingston side from the northeast. Either way you go you're going to encounter some wet and sometimes swampy terrain as you make your way through the woods. But once the ground starts to rise, and you begin



to see the remnants of curbing concrete emerging from the overgrowth along the course of the would-be cloverleaf, you'll know you're on the right track.

As you follow the paths through the break in the forest's tree line, suddenly you emerge onto the long, flat expanse of a four-lane highway with a wide raised median down the center and a pedestrian sidewalk on either side. Having never been opened to vehicular traffic, the roadway is still in excellent condition and has suffered little noticeable deterioration in its nearly half century of existence. It soars two stories above the busy roadway below, where cars and trucks speed beneath your feet. Step to the edge and you can look down at them as they race by without a thought given to the lonely expanse as it passes above their heads.

Up on top, suspended in the open air, the bridge is a serene and peaceful place, quiet, except for the sounds of chirping birds and the omnipresent whoosh made by the cars rushing beneath. But it too sees quite a bit of traffic of its own. It's a popular site for hikers, joggers and off-road vehicle enthusiasts. And, judging from the ubiquitous graffiti, it is also frequently visited by the local teenage population. The charred remains of numerous fire rings indicate that the relative inaccessibility of the location makes it a perfect late night "party spot," and perhaps too remote for authorities to bother patrolling.

So, while it might be "off the beaten path," it is certainly not so distant from it to be "a bridge too far" to travel to and enjoy for yourself. -MM







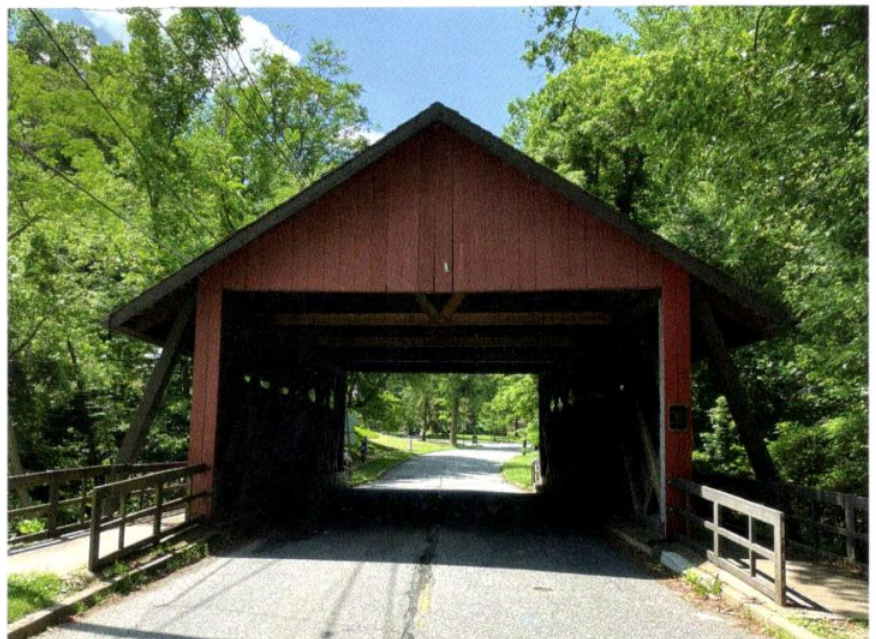
## THE SCARBOROUGH COVERED BRIDGE: NOT NJ'S ONE AND ONLY



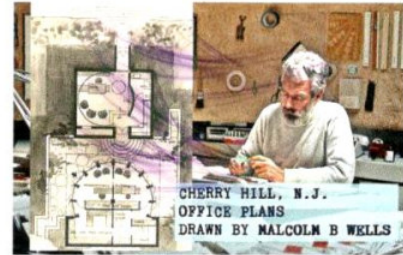
Issue #52 of *Weird NJ* featured an article about Green Sergeant's Bridge, which is located near the town of Stockton. At the time we believed the bridge, which was built in 1872, to be New Jersey's one and only covered bridge still in existence. One *Weird NJ* reader sure let us have it for that mistake, though! Here is letter we received shortly after the publication of the issue:

*Dear Weird NJ; After looking through Issue #52 I saw an article about "The Last Covered Bridge In NJ." That is false information. There is a bridge, where I live, in Cherry Hill. It is called the Scarborough Bridge. It is a covered bridge. You are obviously a North Jersey publication. Issue #52 will be the last issue I buy. There is more to NJ below Trenton. Best Regards, Matt Valosen*

The Scarborough Bridge is a wooden covered bridge in the Barclay Farm neighborhood of Cherry Hill. It carries two lanes of Covered Bridge Road, as well as sidewalks on either side for pedestrian and bicycle traffic. It crosses the North Branch, a small tributary of the Cooper River. The bridge was named after Bob Scarborough, a housing







Malcolm B. Wells and office plans in Cherry Hill, NJ.

developer who established the Barclay Farm neighborhood, where the bridge is located. The bridge was dedicated on Valentine's Day 1959, as 101 couples kissed to mark the tradition of the "Kissing" or "Friendship Bridge."

So even though Mr. Valosen won't be seeing this article, since he vowed to never read this magazine again, we would like to thank him for bringing this bridge to our attention. For while the Scarborough Bridge may not possess the long and storied history of our state's other covered bridge, it can boast at least one interesting and noteworthy characteristic, its designer was famed Cherry Hill architect Malcolm B. Wells, the father of "gentle architecture."

### Going Underground with Malcolm B. Wells

Malcolm Wells is regarded as "the father of modern earth-sheltered architecture." His work in architecture and design began in 1953, but after 10 years "spent spreading corporate asphalt on America in the name of architecture," as he put it, he began to feel that the Earth's surface was "made for living plants, not industrial plants," and went into underground architecture. This was reflected in his semi-underground office located in Cherry Hill, NJ adjacent to the Cooper River. His interests were in energy efficiency, aesthetics, land preservation and restoration and durability of materials.

Wells' best known and most controversial design technique was the practice of "earth sheltering," in which he waterproofed his gently sloping roofs by covering them with three to four feet of rich soil, and then landscaping them with native grasses and shrubs.

While working for the RCA corporation in the early 1960s, Wells was chosen to design the company's pavilion for the 1964 World's Fair at Flushing Meadow, Queens, NY. A *Philadelphia Inquirer* article recounted Wells' reaction to the closing of the '64 World's Fair; "It was at this point that he abruptly changed course. With the realization that the pavilion would be torn down and that all his other buildings, along with their parking lots and concrete footprints had destroyed whatever had lived there before, he began to develop his theories of gentle architecture." It was then that he resigned from RCA and set up his own shop.

His innovative new designs would incorporate features like parking lots paved with oyster shells, roof water runoff troughs that fed the underground aquifer, oxygen creating interior gardens, south-facing windows for solar heating and super insulated skylights for interior lighting.

By 1965 Wells' architecture business was thriving, and he decided to build his new office in Cherry Hill. Located at the intersection of Cuthbert Blvd and Park Blvd, it was designed in a style similar to many of his works of that era, with large timber beams, sloping roofs, and concrete work. It was somewhat reminiscent of the work of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright, except



Architectural drawing of Wells' underground home.





for the fact that it was partially subterranean.

Adjacent to his office he constructed a second earth house in which the entire structure is submerged beneath three feet of dirt. Several interesting quotations can be found emblazoned on the walls throughout the property. One states, "All work passes out of the hands of the architect...into the hands of nature."

In addition to his Cherry Hill office, other notable structures he designed include the Cooper River Parkway in Cherry Hill, the Law School Building at Rutgers Camden, the former Cherry Hill Library, and of course, the Scarborough Covered Bridge.

Wells was sensitive to the environmental changes he witnessed that were taking place in Cherry Hill during his time there. The once quiet road where he had set up his office and studio had become a six-lane street which ran just a few feet from his office's front door.

Wells' response to the encroachment was to construct a sweeping curved concrete wall to separate his nature-friendly environment from the congested roadway. Like all of Wells' designs, even the wall was a work of art, which incorporated a variety of textures and natural elements. The exterior of the wall is embossed with a message in tall white block letters for passersby and all of the people of Cherry Hill to see and ponder. It is a quote from former U.S. General Omar Bradley, which states, "If we are not careful we shall leave our children a legacy of billion dollar roads leading nowhere except to other congested places like those they left behind."

Malcolm B. Wells died in 2009, but his office and earth house are still there and now under private ownership. As is the wall, which remain a curious roadside landmark. One which too few who see it know the origins of.

## Bridging the Great North-South Jersey Divide

We'd like to assure our readers all around this wonderful little state of ours that *Weird NJ* has never been a "North Jersey publication," as Mr. Valosen alleges. We have always endeavored to celebrate the oddness and interesting aspects of New Jersey in its entirety, as it is a place we are proud to call home. From the very beginning of the magazine back in 1993 each issue has included stories from the furthest reaches of the state: from the mountainous northwest corner to the sandy beaches of the southeast, from the heights of the majestic Palisades in the northeast to low and lonesome windswept shores of the Delaware Bay in the southwest, and everywhere in-between.

In fact, we don't even believe that "North Jersey" or "South Jersey" really exist, let alone "Central Jersey." It's a concept that some people have concocted to try to divide the one and only "New Jersey" and the people who live here from each other. We will not be a party to such divisiveness. God knows there's enough of that going around in this country and the rest of the world these days without having to manufacture more of it here at home. We are one publication, about one unique state, all inclusive and united together in a place we affectionately refer to as Weird New Jersey.

-MM



## Message From A Rooftop

Back in February 2015, me and my friend Ashley for some reason or another were looking on Google Maps when we came across these two buildings located in Newark at the intersection of Broad Street and Central Avenue with some unusual writing on their rooftops.

-Tito Z. from Elizabeth



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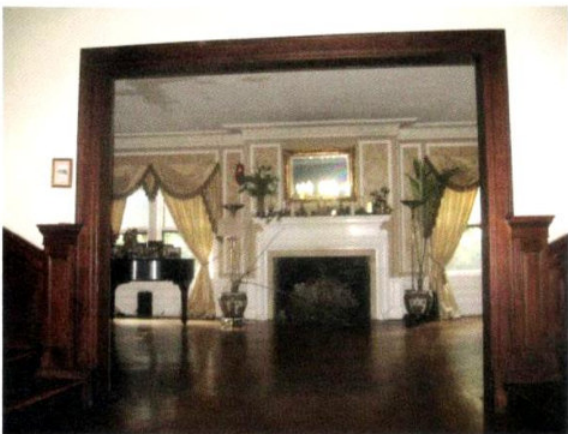
### EST. 1979







## THE BLAUVELT ESTATE VS THE WRECKING BALL



by Greg Sedlacek

When describing Oradell's iconic Blauvelt Mansion, "weird" is not the word. "Intriguing" is. Or, "incredible."

In recent years, its massive brick basement wall with thick bars on the windows has been obscured by large trees. These have been allowed to grow wild during the mansion's seven years of being vacant. However, in days gone by when the wall was visible and the mansion could be viewed in its magnificent entirety it conjured up visions of Batman's "stately Wayne Manor" with the accompanying Batcave. It is that mysterious!

I am just one of thousands of Bergen County baby boomers along with people from surrounding counties who always wondered just what that imposing brick wall was hiding. As young teenagers, many of my friends and I would sneak up to the southern end of the mansion at night just to get a glimpse inside one of its veranda windows. As it turns out, the massive brick wall that conjures up visions of medieval dungeons may have been hiding nothing. I refer to an article entitled, "If These Walls Could Talk: The Atwood-Blauvelt Mansion and the Oradell Story." (Gabrielle Gelo: 2018):

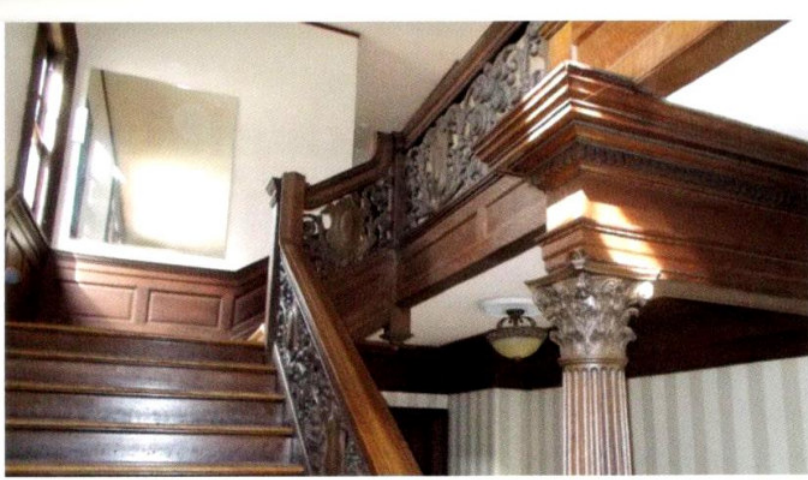
*There is nothing particularly sinister to note about its builder and first inhabitant, Kimball Chase Atwood. If the world famous citrus pioneer was guilty of anything, it was simply his penchant for constructing what at that time in 1897 can best be described as an over the top ostentatious dwelling. The wall also known as the stone parapet is 23 feet high and 140 feet long. It remains an essential component of the mansion's mystique.*

The mansion features ten very large bedrooms, seven bathrooms, and seven fireplaces constructed of fancy imported marble. It also boasts of several grand staircases featuring intricate wood carvings. This writer was unable to gain access to the interior as the current owners of the mansion, Care One nursing facilities, would not grant me an entrance or an interview. However, JoAnn Young, an Oradell resident and the go-to spokesperson for the "Save The Blauvelt Mansion Campaign" was kind enough to forward me some of the interior photos you see here.

The mansion is a treasure trove of artifacts and curiosities dating back to 1897 and some from even before that time.

There was not a lot of drama or intrigue associated with the Atwood family's tenure in the mansion. In 1917, Atwood sold the mansion to John Lozier, an accomplished artist, musician, entrepreneur and sportsman. Lozier was a founding member of the Oradell Gun Club and even counted the legendary sharpshooter Annie Oakley as a friend. When Lozier decided to sell the mansion to Elmer and Margaretta Blauvelt he





did so through an intermediary named William Zabriskie. The reason for this was revealed years later when Oradell historian Frank Vierling discovered a letter to Lozier from his own wife ordering him not to sell to the Blauvelts, the reason being unclear.

The Blauvelt tenure in the mansion was not marked by any particular tragedy beyond the premature, shocking death of their first born son, Hiram Bellis Demarest Blauvelt who died on his 60th birthday. Hiram was a scholar, industrialist, environmentalist, published writer, polo player and big game hunter when it was considered an acceptable and important sport even by conservationists. In an interesting twist of fate, the Blauvelt Carriage House is now a renowned wildlife art museum inhabited by the remarkable spirits of animals, birds and sea creatures.

It is in the present time that the mansion finds itself in the crosshairs of a power struggle between the township of Oradell (plus many of its concerned residents who wish to preserve the mansion and its 4.2 acre lush hillside) and Care One, who acquired the property from its most recent individual owner, an architect/contractor named Jeff Wells. According to JoAnn Young, sometime around 2009, Mr. Wells had hoped to build a catering hall in front of the gothic mansion. However, many neighbors complained that such a use would present many problems such as noise, lights, traffic and food waste issues. Mr. Wells, who was already facing bankruptcy, withdrew that plan. Instead, he partnered with Care One, who has a nursing home facility across the street from the mansion, and they embarked upon a plan to build a large nursing facility in front of the mansion. This would have greatly ruined the ambiance of the spectacular mansion and the rolling hillside it sits atop.

After an 18 month legal battle, the town granted Wells and Care One the right to build a much smaller-than-planned facility. Wells lost the property and Care One took over ownership. In the ensuing years, Young and her husband Paul worked tirelessly at trying to acquire the property and turn it into a non-profit foundation/community center that would essentially leave the mansion intact with minor alterations. However, this ambitious project was financially out of reach for the group of private citizens.

As such, Care One still owns the property and won't sell it for anything under \$5 million. Bergen County refuses to buy the mansion until the adjacent Wells house is unoccupied. At least, that's what the County is saying publicly.

None of this bodes well for the majestic Blauvelt Mansion. Invasive vines are growing all over the basement walls with the prospect of eventually destroying it. The inside of the mansion is beginning to show water damage. Some windows have since been broken.

For a mansion that survived its first 100 plus years unscathed and with limited controversy or upheaval, the future is starting to look extremely cloudy.



This is an excellent color shot of the mansion with the basement in full view!  
Photo credit: Oradell Library

## The (Once) Grand NJ Estate of "New York's Wealthiest Bachelor"

The Gilded Age in Morris County was one of opulence and excess. It was a place where the wealthy from New York City either emigrated to permanently, or made their "country" homes. One such estate was that of Eugene Higgins, a lifelong bachelor who was fond of riding fast horses, organizing fox hunts, racing cars, fencing and cruising on yachts.

He acquired his enormous fortune from his father who was president of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad, director of the Consolidated Gas Company, and president of the Central Bank of New York. He inherited all of these titles, as well as a fortune from a lucrative carpet-making business his parents owned, around 1890.

Eugene owned a townhouse on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, where he was known as "New York's Wealthiest Bachelor" (beating out George Vanderbilt II), and he decided upon the outskirts of Morristown to build his sprawling country estate. In addition to an immense mansion, the property included horse stables, greenhouses, a coach house, a gardener's house, six racket and lawn tennis courts, and his own, private train station for commuting to NYC. Furthermore, he employed fifty Hungarian and other artisans who lived in shanties on the grounds.

However, the most impressive feature was undoubtedly a three-tier, open-air grandstand which overlooked a half-mile oval track used for driving race cars. The track was one of the first private automobile race tracks in the United States. In the center of the



track was a polo field where the best players in the area congregated for games.

The site of this lavish property was on Hanover Avenue, which today is occupied by the Mennen Arena ice rinks (former practice facility of the NHL's New Jersey Devils), and other businesses. Nothing much remains of Higgins' extravagant estate—except one vestige, all alone in the woods.

I had known about "the columns in the woods," as I called them, for quite some time, and had always wondered about their history. They sit in a wooded patch between a pretty high-trafficked road and the parking lot of a multi-use commercial building. They look utterly out-of-place, their obvious age jibing with none of their modern surroundings. But why did it take me so long to finally figure out what they were?

For as important as he was, Eugene Higgins is not at all a well-known name around town today. In fact, I doubt anyone you asked on the street would be able to tell you who he was, let alone where his estate used to be. This is why I have found only one article referencing the location of it, and the topic of the article was about "Morristown's Forgotten Lakes" and Higgins was just mentioned in passing because his property was in proximity to two of them.

At any rate, the article mentioned that the entrance used to be near the intersection of Cory Road and Emmett Avenue. That's when things clicked and I had my answer; the columns in the woods belonged to the old, ornate gate of the Higgins Estate. Ironically, even though they were the first things that wealthy guests saw as they arrived there all those decades ago, they seem to be the very last remains of the once great residence. -Keith Seminerio



## Bodies of Brooklyn couple found beaten to death on Rt.80

WEST PATERSON, N.J. (UPI) — The bodies of a man and woman found beaten to death in a secluded area near Route 80 have been identified as a couple from Brooklyn, N.Y., police said Sunday.

The victim identified as Howard Green, 53, and Carol Marron, 33, of 280 DeKalb Avenue, were found in a rug and twine last week in a wooded tract. Authorities found a laundry ticket stapled on the man's jacket.

## Wanderer Is Sought In Killings

the special adding that bribery and tion. The committee also directed its attorney to look into the possibility of the integrity of the Legislature and you See CASINOS, Page 5

## Blood drained from victims

Gov. Brendan T. Byrne Tries to halt involvement with casinos

tely dry," he said. What's becoming longer every day is the possibility of the occulting involved in some y, shape or form."

The couple, who lived in a \$58-a-month apartment in West Paterson, was once known as "witches" by neighbors, who lived in the same tract as them at the time, said Jim Devereaux.

Devereaux said of the couple, "He grew up in Paterson. They were killed in their backyard, so

the man used to be nice in his neighborhood. He cut off their ears and drain their

what I understand was an attempt to tell me. If I felt close to him, I was interested in him. He'd do the blood on the table. But I don't know why," said Jim Devereaux. Miss Marron was branded the "redhead," and

## Satanic link to deaths probed

By DAVID M. LEVITT Staff Writer

Ex-West Paterson man sought for questioning



The mutilated bodies of Howard Green and Carol Marron were found on this spot along New Street in West Paterson in 1979.

## STRANGE UNSOLVED OCCULT KILLING IN WEST PATERSON, 1979

by Mark Sceurman

It was a chilly 32 degrees on December 16, 1979 when a few boys out walking a dog at 7:00PM around Route 80 in West Paterson (now Woodland Park) came across a tangled up roll of canvas and rugs. The boys were curious and a closer look revealed something macabre and unsettling. They noticed what they thought was blood on the canvas.

The West Paterson Police were called and they discovered the bodies of a man and a woman, bound with rope and wire and wrapped up in the matted material. It was not the usual mob hit scene, however, and it turned out to be one of the most bizarre murders West Paterson Police had ever seen. To this day it still goes unsolved.

53-year old Howard Green and 33-year old Carol Marron had both been brutally beaten across the left side of their heads in an identical manner. Both victims had the tips of their ears cut off and their eyeballs stabbed with a knife. All over both bodies the coroner discovered dozens of puncture marks, which appeared to be made from a very large surgical needle. Even stranger, the puncture marks were in identical locations on both bodies. It seems that Green and Marron had almost been fully drained of their blood. The coroner noted that the blood removal was expertly done, as there were only small splatters of blood found on the rolled up canvas. It was possible that a vet-

erinarian's needle could have been used to drain the blood. In each clutched hand of the victims was found a clump of black hair, but was this an occult symbol or the hair of their murderer?

The victims were identified from a laundry ticket stapled inside Green's jacket. The ticket was traced to a laundry in Brooklyn. An employee at the laundry helped identify the couple from pictures.

Howard Green and Carol Marron, residents of Brooklyn shared a \$58-a-month basement apartment at 270 DeKalb Avenue for eight years. Green was an artist and cab driver and Marron was a secretary at Brooklyn's Pratt Institute. When the police searched the apartment, they found various items of an occult nature. The couple were last seen alive on December 15 by a friend who met up with them on a subway train.

New York Detective Jim Devereaux who was assisting New Jersey police with the investigation told reporters at the time, "It was definitely a satanic murder, and it wasn't a one-man job. In all my years in this business, I've never seen anything like this."

Journalist Maury Terry, a so-called expert on the Son of Sam case and other cult killings had written more than 40 articles on the topic. He received an anonymous letter about this double homicide, which he included in his book *The Ultimate Evil* (1987):



*Dear Maury Terry. Please look into this double killing. Carol was asking people about the O.T.O. a year prior to the murders. I can't accept that the people responsible for this are still walking around free. I am afraid that the problem will not go away and that minds this unbalanced may perpetuate (sic) additional horrors. Forgive me for not signing my name. I haven't gotten over the fear.*

The correspondent of the anonymous letter was never identified, but was referring to the Ordo Templi Orientis—a ritual occult society once led by the self-named “Great Beast 666” Aleister Crowley. During World War II, Crowley established branches across the United States, including in New York, that formed a loose network functioning via occult shops, bookstores, newsletters and personal contacts. Many believe the entire occult underground in America today can be traced to Crowley’s O.T.O. lodges. Crowley died in 1947. (See sidebar.)

Terry told Detective Devereaux at the time, “The only murderous satanic cult I know of in the New York area is the Son of Sam group, but the NYPD won’t admit it exists, so we’re stymied.”

Devereaux stated that, “We’ve gone through the conventional types of motives—drugs, lovers, landlord tenant fights—and we’ve come up completely dry. What’s becoming stronger every day is the possibility of the occult being involved in some way, shape or form.”

Green and Marron were once referred to as “witches” by a former neighbor. The police tried locating that neighbor, who had moved out prior to the murders. His strange behavior had authorities interested in talking with him. The neighbor, who lived upstairs from the couple used to catch mice in his apartment, cut off their heads and drain their blood, detectives said.

“For one thing the neighbor grew up in West Paterson. The couple were killed in his own back yard, so to speak,” said Devereaux. “From what I understand he was an attention getter. If someone he felt close to did not appear interested in him anymore, he’d kill the mice and leave the blood on the kitchen table, but don’t ask me why.”

Police were told the former neighbor was a drifter who wandered around with a guitar and a dog. He supposedly was hitchhiking across Texas and Oklahoma when the murders happened. Oddly enough, at the time this man was linked to Oklahoma, several cows were found drained of their blood, but that was a speculative quote from a newspaper account of the killings.

There was always confusion among the police as to who should have investigated this grim unsolved murder over 40 years ago. Retired detectives from both Brooklyn’s 88<sup>th</sup> Precinct and the West Paterson Police Department along with the Passaic County Prosecutor’s Office had thought each had done follow-up investigations.

In March 2002 The *New York Post* reported that the Brooklyn Cold Case Squad was going to assign a detective to review evidence in the case, but Brooklyn’s 88<sup>th</sup> precinct “couldn’t find” the case file.

In the *New York Post* article, it stated there were inconsistencies between both the NYPD and The West Paterson Police. Devereaux recalled satanic paraphernalia being found inside the victim’s apartment and the place was in disarray and drenched in blood. Retired Detective Joseph Lambert said the apartment was neat and clean, with no signs of devil worship. Other newspaper reports at the time stated there was a bloody shoeprint on the floor. The landlord, Jonathan Nelson was also interviewed at the time and he said he had no ill will for the tenants, but did want the basement apartment for his aging father.

The “Satanic Panic” of the late 1970s gave worldwide attention to David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam killer who murdered six people and wounded seven others in New York in 1976. Berkowitz claimed he joined a cult in the spring of 1975, which introduced him to drug use, sadistic pornography and violent crime. They began, he claims, by killing dogs. Many mutilated dog corpses were found in Yonkers by Untermeyer Park, the place, Berkowitz stated that these occult meetings would take place. His dog-induced hallucinations had his neighbor’s dog telling him to commit murder.

Within weeks of his arrest Berkowitz claimed there were many cult mem-



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bers, maybe two dozen or more in the New York area, and ties across the United States. Strangely, witnesses to these shootings gave confusing sketches that seemed to look like different people, as the shootings stretched from Queens to the Bronx.

Edward Murphy—who now works for the Emergency Management of Passaic County—was a patrolman that night, was called to the scene when the boys discovered the bodies. “They were found off of Squirrelwood Road in the woods by New Street. I had to wait around until the coroner arrived on the scene. It was believed they were murdered in New York then dumped here.”

Law enforcement terms can vary from crime scene to crime scene. Many times the term “ritualistic” is used because there are elements of something other than a common murder. It is possible the murders of Carol Marron and Howard Green had occult overtones. Who knows what the perpetrator(s) were into or for what reasons they would cut off the tips of their ears and drain their blood with a surgical needle after they were beaten to death. It’s possible that the killer was just insane and had nothing to do with occultism or satanism. Possibly it could have been “camouflage” for other motives known only to the killer.

The identical nature of the bodies and how they were found could be ritualistic or systematic. It seems to be the work of more than one killer. In large cities many stray dogs are caught, neutered, then released. Often they would clip the tip of the dog’s ears to show that it had seen a vet. Was there a connection between the clipping of the victim’s ears and the possibility of using a veterinarian’s surgical needle to drain their blood?



# O.T.O. Q&A

by Brigid Burke

I frequently hear references to "Aleister Crowley's O.T.O." in the same breath as satanism, satanic murders, or other kinds of criminal activity. The latest is the death of Ari Behn, former husband of a Norwegian princess, who was supposedly driven to suicide by "O.T.O.'s black magic and satanism." This idea is repeated a lot in the blogosphere, but how realistic are these claims? The short answer is "not realistic at all." Here are some facts about the O.T.O.

## What is the O.T.O.?

O.T.O. stands for "Ordo Templi Orientis" (Order of the Eastern Temple), and is similar to Freemasonry in its degree system and rituals. Its rituals and philosophy center around "Thelema," a kind of religious philosophy developed by Aleister Crowley, whose chief tenet is "Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be the Whole of the Law; Love is the Law, Love Under Will." This means that "Thelemites" are people who value freedom, and want to spend their lives doing something authentic to themselves and what they feel is their "True Will." The central ritual of the O.T.O. is the Gnostic Mass, a Eucharistic ritual based on Crowley's "Book of the Law" that ideally helps congregants open up to their "True Will."

## Do they practice satanism or black magic?

No, there are no Order rituals that would qualify as either.

Definitions of Satan and satanism in esoteric societies are different from the idea of the Devil as Ultimate Evil; "Satan" is more of a concept, having to do with incarnation (the descent of Spirit into Matter). There are no O.T.O. rituals worshipping Satan, and the Gnostic Mass is not a satanic ritual. You can find the full text of the Gnostic Mass online, and if you have an O.T.O. Lodge, Oasis, or Camp nearby, you can ask to attend a public Mass. That said—

there may be individual O.T.O. members who practice satanism, if it is in accordance with their "Will."

## But hasn't the O.T.O. been involved with satanic murders?

Nope. People like to point to the O.T.O. because they think Crowley was a satanist, which apparently means human sacrifice and ritual murder to those who get their ideas from horror movies. Crowley did not define himself as a satanist; in fact, he brought a defamation suit against Nina Hamnett in 1934 for calling him a "black magician."

Like any organization, you have a mixed bag of people from a variety of religious backgrounds, political views and belief systems. Is it possible that a murderer lurks in the ranks? Sure—just as a murderer might be part of a Christian congregation, or a Jewish one, or a Hindu one. That has to do with the individual and not any O.T.O. group doctrine or belief. Members are expected to be respectful of each other and their differences—doesn't always happen, but generally those who make trouble for others are expelled from the Order. Respecting the Will of others means respecting their views and their boundaries. Anyone can join the Order, though lodgemasters do their best to dissuade all the "reincarnations of Aleister Crowley" from applying.

For more information on O.T.O., Thelema, and groups in the United States, visit [www.oto-usa.org](http://www.oto-usa.org).

If Howard Green and Carol Marron were enquiring about joining the O.T.O. for some time without success, it is likely that they were rejected, ignored or steered elsewhere. Lodgemasters get mail (snail and email) all the time from people who are, shall we say, not particularly well adjusted. Quite a few allege themselves to be "Crowley reincarnated." These folks are either ignored or gently put off.

Maurice Lee, a Douglas College history professor was quoted in *The Morning News* of Paterson (Feb. 22, 1980) as saying of the murder, "People read these things and create their own rationales. The dominant satanic cults wouldn't have anything to do with this murder."

The dumping of the bodies alongside the road is perplexing, also. It doesn't seem like too much thought went into concealing the murder, as if whoever did it wanted the victims to be found. I have no idea what occult paraphernalia the police found. Knowing what they supposedly found that was occult-related would be helpful in identifying what may have gone on.

## A Conclusion? We Think Not.

I don't think we can come to a conclusion whether the murders were cult-related or not, and the clues are complicated and confusing, only because it was handled by two precincts and the passing of over 40 years since the crime. The Brooklyn detectives themselves said the case had the look of an occult-related killing, and there are certainly enough hints left by the killer(s) that something bizarre went on before Howard Green and Carol Marron were murdered. With all unsolved crimes, police do not reveal all the evidence. We hope by bringing this strange murder back into the light, someone may have a clue as to what happened that cold December night in 1979. Do any of you readers have thoughts about the case? We'd like to hear them.

## JERSEY SKIN



### Starting With The County Lines, Then Add A Devil

This tat is definitely unfinished, but I plan on doing the top half sleeve with the Jersey Devil and then the rest of my arm with *Weird NJ* stuff!

-Daniel M. Edwards



### Jersey In The Blood

I'm a born and raised Jersey girl. Jersey is in my blood and I wanted to get a tattoo to represent my pride. My tattoo was done at Taboo Tattoos in Keyport.

-Debbie Emery



# IT'S A WEIRD NJ STATE OF MIND!



Found this marble on the path in Little Falls along the Passaic River. Held it to the sun and saw NJ. -Wheeler



During the pandemic-related shutdown, on one of many walks through our Vineland, NJ neighborhood, we noticed a piece of rock in the asphalt less than 1/2 a mile from our house. Strange we'd never noticed it before, as the color is a stark contrast with the asphalt, and the shape was unmistakable!

-Sean, Irena, and Avery Fischer



My niece recently bought a pair of "distressed" jeans and we noticed that one of the tattered areas looks exactly like our great State of NJ! She's 10 years old and lives in Robbinsville.

-Mark Nyerges, Hamilton Square



I was washing some dishes and noticed that the soap bubbles made a NJ state shape! -Krista F., Carney's Point



My pork chop, New Jersey style!

-Rick Brzostowski, West Creek



My thumbnail paint chipped off in the shape of New Jersey!

-Madelyn Worthley



I spilled water on my floor and I saw New Jersey! -Courtney Knipp from Ocean Gate



My husband is in Buenos Aires and ordered a steak last night.

-Jim Leffler, Michael Broking, Mt. Arlington



I had just finished using the restroom at work when I noticed this on the floor! I got a well-needed chuckle out of it!

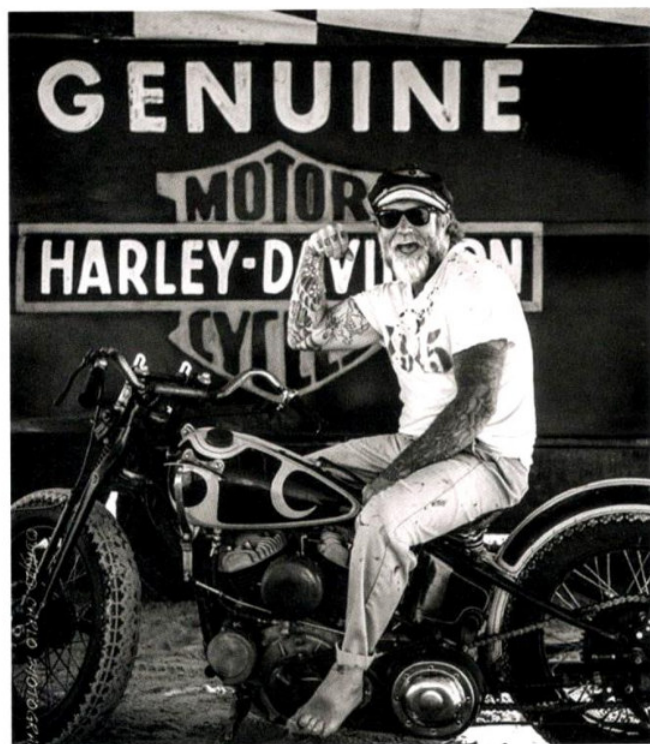
-Becky Gastaldi





*Get Your Motors Running for...*

# T.R.O.G. – The Race of Gentlemen



by Mark Moran

Imagine you're standing on a beach. The summer has just ended and the sunbathing crowds have all returned home, their memories of another vacation season gone by still warm in their minds. But the beach is by no means deserted—quite to the contrary, in fact. A phalanx of rumbling metal machines form in a line before you on the sand. Their engines growl and roar like pent up animals waiting for their cage door to be sprung open. A serpentine rollercoaster and gigantic spinning Ferris wheel rise up from the edge of the sand dunes to your left. To your right, the brilliant expanse of the glistening ocean is almost blinding. You turn once more to the line of cars before you as if in a dream. Suddenly, a checked flag flies before your face and there's an explosion of furious noise as the suped-up cars come off the line, their tires throwing sand high in the early Autumn air. The race is on!

Everywhere you look you see hot rods and roaring motorcycles cutting through the sand. But there's something not right about these wild rough riders, something very out of the ordinary. Their machines are all from a bygone era, vintage yes, but certainly not custom car show vehicles. These rods and Harleys are from another time altogether, a time way before most of us were born. And the men driving them seem to be from a different age as well, dressed more like Marlon Brando's character in 1953 film *The Wild One* than any speedster of today. Who are these guys, you wonder, and where the hell am I?

It's a weird scene indeed. But this isn't taking place on Daytona Beach in 1947 or the Bonneville Salt Flats. This is taking place right now and it's happening on the sandy shores of New Jersey. Welcome to T.R.O.G.: The Race of Gentlemen.

The Race of Gentlemen is actually a series of events that are the brainchild of one Meldon Van Riper Stultz III, who is 50 years of age. If we were to describe Mel physically, as an automobile, we might say something like, "A compact and sturdily constructed model, built for speed." He's not a tall man by any means, yet he possesses a powerful



countenance, and an energetic disposition. He comes from a family that has been in Keyport, "Gateway to the Jersey Shore," for four generations. When he was old enough, Mel joined the Marine Corps, and after serving, came home to realize that Keyport just wasn't big enough for him anymore.

He relocated down to Asbury Park in the 1990s, before the economic resurgence of the town, where Mel and his friends lived in the abandoned buildings and showered on the deserted beach. He was a gigging musician in punk rock and hardcore bands at the time and loved Asbury Park because that's where the venues to play were located. After he began to realize that a career in music might not be in the cards for him, he says he needed a new hobby and began to get involved in hot rods—vintage hot rods, 1930s Fords, mostly.

"I basically jumped in by buying a car, not knowing how to actually work on it," He remembers. "But that's what the fun part was, the learning curve. Finding information and trying to figure it all out, talking to old guys who I've always got along with and I find more interesting." He built his first hot rod, a 1930 model A Ford sedan, in a boarded-up building off Cookman Avenue.

"So, in the early days, we played instruments there, because it was an empty building and was really the underground when Asbury was still pretty scary. But that's kind of what drew me to Asbury."

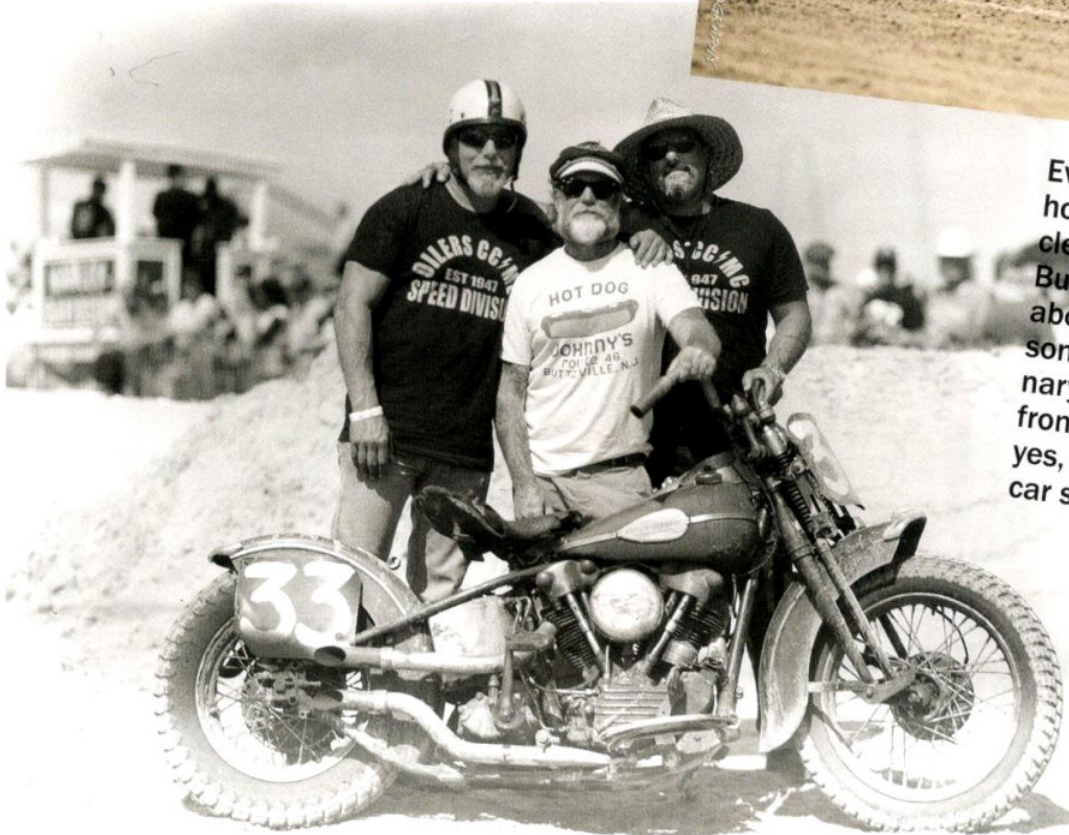
At the time, he and his friends were living in the backside of the run-down Casino Building on the south end of the boardwalk. This was after the carousel had been removed from the adjoining Carousel House and the space was being used as a skateboard park. One of Mel's friends had been running the Casino Skate Park in the darkest days of Asbury Park when all kinds of alternative attractions were popping up to try to draw at least some people back to the once bustling seaside resort town.

"It had a phenomenal halfpipe, the largest on the East Coast," Mel recalls. "Lots of people came in from all over. That was kind of during the time of the Warped Tours and so bands would set up in the middle of town and take over. We were basically there to kind of show them where to party. We were hanging out with all the crazy professional skaters and punk rock bands like Murphy's Law. It was really interesting to live there."

*Weird NJ* met with Mel earlier this year to discuss how a young man



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goes from basically being a squatter living in an abandoned building in Asbury Park to becoming the multi-faceted entrepreneur, impresario and raconteur that he is today. We found that the course was anything but a straight line.

**Weird NJ: Meldon Van Riper Stultz III, that's a real mouthful! Mind if we just call you Mel?**

MVRS: Yes, it's very German, English, Irish and Dutch. A crazy lineage, Dutch dukes that slept with chambermaids and were thrown out of the country. Lord Calvert on my mom's side, the whiskey founder. Maryland and Delaware Declaration of Independence signers, all kinds of crazy stuff related to Stephen Crane.

**Now we know your origin story, but say we met in a bar and I asked you what do. How would you answer?**

I usually scare people with the long pause because I almost don't know how to answer. It's like, oh geez, how am I gonna explain what it is I do? I've never called myself a surfer, a musician, a hot rodder... master of none. I like a little bit of everything. And I like to know how to dabble and talk about it, and have fun with it, but once it feels like work, I'm just over it.

**How you were making your living at the time?**

I've always been a go-getter. I've always been the leader. I'm not afraid of anything. So I charge. So being in the Marines, it was kind of a breeze for me. I was fit and I could do anything they asked. I was a sharpshooter, all that kind of stuff. But I learned I didn't like being told what to do. I'm not the brightest—the sharpest tool in box. I go in with my heart and balls and just charge it. But after I got out of the Marines, I never wanted to be told what to do again. I basically figured out and by accident, really, how to navigate through life, be creative and happy, and then somehow make a paycheck. Often robbing Peter to pay Paul and living on a ramen diet, but it was a great education.

Mel and his friends started organizing shows of their own, music and art. It was a loose-fitting underground collaborative of weirdos from Asbury, Red



PHOTO BY MARK MORAN



Bank and Belmar, which began a buzz around the area that something cool was going down. One of the places they began to throw shows was at was Asbury Lanes, when it was still a bowling alley with the original owner since 1961.

"Sometimes, wanting to take a break from what we were creating, we would go bowling. And we were the only guys in there. It was literally a group of nine of us. The guy looked at us all kind of crooked eyed because we had neck tattoos or beards or whatever. His name was Ralph Ales, and we got to know him and he warmed up to us pretty quickly. He was real sweet.

"I threw my first car show next to the Wonderbar, which wasn't the Wonderbar at the time. It was just a just a blank canvas, of sorts, and it was called the Jalopy Jump and Jive. And it was based on rock and roll, hot rods and motorcycles, and art. And that was a pretty good success for the area. People really dug what it was I did there. And, I have lots of friends far and wide, and everybody came in for it. And everybody thought, man, there's just as a cool place to be."

After that first show other local bars started asking Mel to do a night at their clubs because they could see he knew how to throw a party. But he didn't want to just "do a night" a random bars—he had grander venues on his mind.

## Mel: The Drag Years

Mel began working on bars in town and had tremendous success with transforming them into places where people wanted to hang. His first was a joint near the corner of Cookman Ave. and Bond Street in Asbury Park which he called the Oddfellows Lodge. It was a bare brick room that Mel had given the look and feel of an antique service station garage, with hand-painted signs and gas station props. The decor was augmented by paraphernalia from secret societies, like the Oddfellows, Mummers, Skull and Bones, and old Masonic stuff.

"It was really cool for about a year, but after a while all the people that came in were like fist pumpers, bro culture has arrived."

**After Oddfellows Lodge, you turned your attention back to Asbury Lanes.**

I basically ran the Lanes from day one when it became a rock and roll club. We built the stage in the middle of the lanes. And we left the lanes open on the left and right. I brought in flea markets, record swaps—all that kind of stuff. We had a punk rock night that was unbelievable. Every night we had something really cool going on, but it mostly survived on garage rock. I'm a huge fan of the late '50s/'60s: the Kingsmen, the Sonics, all that dirty original punk rock and roll. So that was basically my main bread and butter, entertainment.

I ran that for at least five, six years, and that was my main gig. But I was building hot rods by day. So, I bought a house in Neptune, right outside Asbury. I couldn't afford Asbury at the time because we had made it hip and people started moving in and forced us out.

That's when I basically started building hot rods more full time at your house. At the time I was running a car club called the Rumlbers, based on the idea that cars rumble. The leader of that club was Roger Miret, of Agnostic Front, but I wound up running the club. I was like the president of the country where I would oversee different chapters of the Rumlbers in California, New Mexico, Ohio and New York.

But I was missing promoting things. And then Raceway Park, knowing my history of car shows and Asbury Lanes and all, actually invited us to do a car show there with music, real retro, cool music.

But rather than take the raceway up on their offer to have him put on an



PHOTO BY MARK MORAN







event at the park, Mel asked them instead if he could use a smaller antiquated racetrack located on the property from races of yore. It was a relic from the days when dragsters used to race on an eight-mile track. In the early days of drag racing, cars raced on the short track, but as cars got faster in the '50s, '60s and '70s they moved to a quarter-mile track to accommodate the higher speeds. The strip had been poorly maintained over the past few decades and only used on Sundays by kids racing go-karts. When Mel offered to take over the track Raceway Park happily obliged.

"I created what I named Motor Speedway. I created props that looked like they should be there: old hand-painted advertisements, car oils, all this is Harley Davidson stuff. I built a movable bar out of an old dumpster because I didn't want to have to corral people behind a fence to drink. So, we got inventive. We built this radical old building with a corrugated metal roof and old beams, and then I made these giant barn doors that slid open so the whole place was wide open.

"Then basically I went to town promoting the shit out of this the way I did everything else, screaming from the rooftops, 'Be there or be square!' And you know, I started bringing in bands like Los Straitjackets and put them right on the drag strip.

"We were drag racing cars and bikes. The funny thing is that the world has really never raced cars and motorcycles together. You either go to bike events or you go to car events. I was like, what the fuck? Why would they not go hand in hand? Motor Speedway was that: hand in hand bikes and cars—send two cars down, send two bikes, and a bike against a car. Yeah, it was like it was a pure rock and roll, man."

**I would assume that all of this was covered by Raceway Park, insurance-wise?**

Yes...probably. The neat thing about it was that it was all traditional hot rods, and so never evolved any further than let's say 1955. We like the more romantic aspect of it, when guys came home from the war and had all this these ideas and basically salvaged a big motor from 1942 and shoved it in the littlest car they could get. That's how hot rodding was born. You basically take a Model T or a Model A that weighs nothing, you pull its guts out of it and throw them away. Then you take the biggest Flathead V-8 motor and shove it in and it's a little monster. To me, it's like you're creating a little Frankenstein.

### The Birth of T.R.O.G.

Mel and his friends now had a place to race and were calling themselves a hot rod club. Only problem was they didn't have a name. Then they discovered a book called *The Birth of Hot*

*Rodding*, about the early hot rodders and their experimental and sometime death-defying ideas of how to supe up a car. It features the hot rod builders of the Bonneville Salt Flats Race Track in Wendover, Utah. The salt flats were first used for motor sports in 1912, but become truly popular in the 1930s, and they're still setting new land speed records there today.

"Man, and me and my friends, we're loving this book." Mel remembered. "We'd sleep and breathe it."

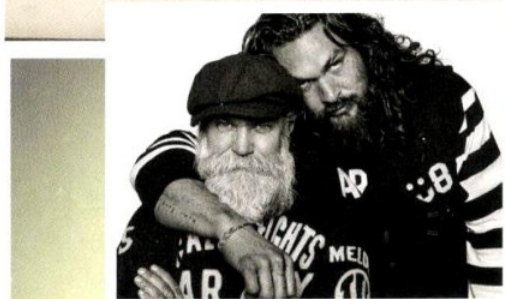
**One of the drag racing icons that inspired you was Jim Nelson, who had a legendary car club called the Oilers.**

We knew all about them. We'd been reading about them for years. They're legends, these dudes. The Oilers Car Club, founded in 1947, when these five guys came back from the war. I have a connection with that. I respect all the military. My family are deep military people, Battle of the Bulge, World War II. So these are my kind of guys. Jim Nelson was amazing, but he got out of hot rodding when fuel injection comes into play. So like 1950 The Oilers go, yeah, we're done. And that's it.

**You eventually started a long-distance phone relationship with Jim Nelson, who lived in California and was the last of the surviving Oilers.**

There was no club left at that point; he was just standing over the name, the legacy. And I tell him all about what we're doing here in Jersey and I think he's pretty impressed. And he basically says, "I like you guys, you're a real racing club, because most clubs are jacket clubs. They just get together and they meet in parking lots and they wear jackets and they look like a gang." We were over that. That was the Rumbler. We want to build cars and use cars, that's what it's all about, not sitting around in parking lots.

Then Jim tells us that everybody's gone. He's the last. The last of the Mohicans. And basically, he pats me on the back and says, "Hey man, go, here's the torch," and hands over the Oilers Car Club. I kept in touch with



Mel and Jason Momoa





him the next year to show him pictures of our drag strip, then he passes away. **In 2012 you came up with the idea for The Race of Gentlemen. How did that all start?**

I wanted to create something original. My buddy Mike, who's in the Oilers, came to Convention Center in Asbury Park for the afternoon. We're sitting beach side, and I'm looking at the ocean. There's the ocean this way and the beach runs parallel with it. I said, "Dude, that's like a fucking dragstrip, look at that. There's nobody on the beach today. Imagine if we could race on that!"

I'd read about these guys testing these machines in 1890 that they would go to the beach, because if it caught on fire, they'd drive it into the ocean. If they had no brakes, and they were doing 100 miles an hour, they would drive it into the soft sand and just slow it down. Same practice they use at the end of drag strips these days. After you break through a fence, you're in a lot of sand because sand just slows everything down.

These guys are pushing up their fucking cardigan sleeves, sweaters rolling up. They're in button-down suit shirts, and slacks, and they're fucking tied to a frame and a motor and a steering wheel. The very early days of testing these insane machines out and the shareholders that were fronting the money looking on at them. These guys with these grand ideas and fucking balls of steel, and I'm like, this is fucking punk rock!

They dressed the way they did because they had to sell this idea to somebody, so they'd be in a suit and go, here's what we're gonna do today. And then wheels would fall off, it would go awry. This is the beginning of Chevrolet and Ford and General Motors. All these corporations that are fighting with these wild geniuses, and again, it's my story. It's a guy with an idea and balls and money and people to make it happen.

**So, the wheels are turning, where do you go from there?**

I say to my buddy, we need a beach town that will let us do this, but I only know one mayor. His town was right next door to Asbury Park. I wasn't even thinking about creating a business or doing really much. It just came organically.

Later that same day, a friend of mine was DJing at the outside bar at the Asbury Park Convention Center and out of nowhere the Mayor of Allenhurst walks in. One town to the north. He goes, "You know, we talk about you all the time."

I said, "Me? Why are you talking about me?"

And he's like, "We get a kick out of you."

I go, "Well, I just mentioned you today, too. I had this kooky idea about drag racing hot rods and Harleys on your beach."

And he was like, "I love Harley Davidsons! And you know what? The mayor next door in Loch Arbour does too! Let me ask him about this."

He calls me a day or two later and says, "Mel, the other mayor's into it, I think I can get this past the town council. When do you want to do it?"

I said, "Give me a year!"

You don't overthink it beforehand. Which is usually how I operate, just kind of charge and then ask for forgiveness instead of permission. So I went home, called 15 guys with the best cars I knew all through the area—Pennsylvania, New York, Connecticut—the baddest cars I knew. Told them we'd be drag racing two cars at a time, two bikes at a time, all vintage traditional hot rods, car bodies 1934 and earlier. But we would allow the drive train to be up to 1953, the last year of the flathead. Harleys 1947 or below. So, the knucklehead and earlier. All street legal. Everybody said yes.

We pulled off a Friday night party on the beach, with a bonfire with rock and roll bands. Then Saturday was a day of racing with 15 cars and 15 bikes. And I came up with the name The Race of Gentlemen because although these guys were wild men, they're cavemen trying to figure things out like building the wheel, I saw them as gentlemen.

**The acronym for The Race Of Gentlemen is "T.R.O.G.," as in the 1960s SciFi/Horror B-movie with Joan Crawford about a cave-dwelling troglodyte.**

And my favorite band, the Troggs (famous for mid-60s hits like "Wild Thing"). They were originally called the Troglodytes but cut it down to Troggs. The juxtaposition of the name is that, you know, gentlemen/cavemen.

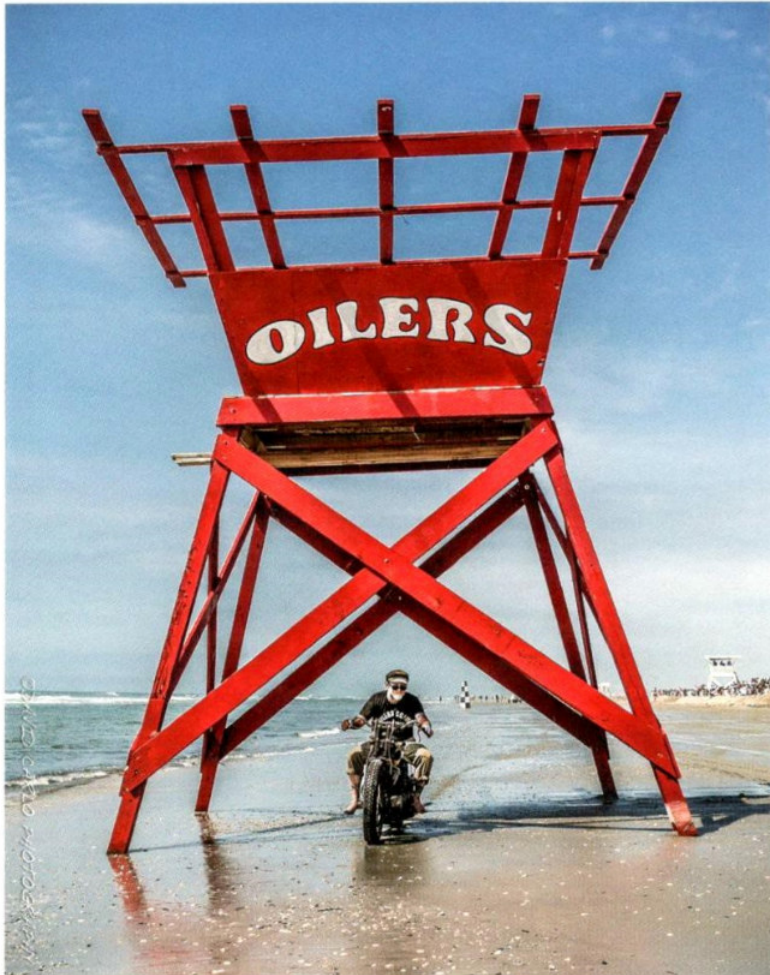
## Gentlemen – Start Your Engines!

**One of the things that I find most interesting about T.R.O.G. is its sense of style. You certainly don't look like you're an everyday bunch of leather-clad gearheads. Along with the traditional cars and bikes, you've also patterned yourself after an aesthetic that is more in line with those early racers, including the clothing and riding gear.**

The reason I like everything that's vintage is because it was designed so well. I love all that stuff. But I walk this fine line, because it's the modern day and don't want to be a goofball. I like things to be timeless. It's just because they







used to design things better: better toasters, better looking furniture, everything looked better, aesthetically pleasing.

I think we put more pride into what it was we were building or fixing, and we became artisans along the way. We were constantly trying to outdo ourselves, and that's what America is founded on. And that's not where we are today. I believe the reason people even know who the hell I am—because I'm nobody special—is because I stick out because I have those values.

**After the first race on the beach, were there subsequent ones in that town? Or was that a one-off thing?**

We had hoped that there would be a second, though it was never my intent to create this event as a job. It was a it was a real flyer-type event. That's how we got the word out: with flyers and a little bit of social media, and 3,000 people showed up. We told the mayor that maybe 500 would come at the most, and the cops were overwhelmed. This was the off season, which is how I snuck this past.

The neat thing was that the affluent people that live there went to the city and instead of complaining, they said, "You know, those cycle guys and all those weirdos that were here? We watched them from out of our windows. When garbage blew out of their cars, they got out and they walked until they found it and put it back in their car." They were complimenting us and said we were good people.

But there would be no second event held on that beach because Superstorm Sandy came five days later.

But T.R.O.G. had done something that hadn't been done before, and the hot rod and motorcycle world was now paying attention. *Hot Rod* magazine, the oldest magazine in existence in the hot rod world, wrote to Mel and told him they wanted to put T.R.O.G. on their cover.

"It was the first issue in 14 years that I can remember having a just one complete photo on the cover. And then when I opened it, there were 14 pages inside devoted to us! Nothing like that had happened in *Hot Rod* magazine in a long time. And then everybody else paid attention. It just snowballed"

**Your next event was held in Wildwood. How did that location get chosen?**

Superstorm Sandy came wiped out Allenhurst, so we were basically on the hook. Everyone's going nuts and then, BOOM, Superstorm Sandy happens.





We're on this high from what we just did, it was a wild time. So we helped put the cities back together in our neighborhoods, but Allenhurst never got really put back together in time because it had such damage. The mayor gave me a heads up and said, "You better start thinking about somewhere else if you're going to try and plan it."

By chance Wildwood reached out to us and said, "We got a lot more beach down here, and we have a lot more hotels. Would you consider doing it down here instead?"

So I went down and was like, holy shit! I didn't remember how big the beaches were. I was amazed at what I saw. I said, all right, let's do it! So we put the second Race Of Gentlemen on in Wildwood, and the following year it was huge, thousands of people. There were two days of racing with more participants. I think we might have been something like 25 or 50 racers.

**Are these racers all personally invited by you, or do people submit applications to be participate?**

They do they submit an application with details of their car or their motorcycle with photos. And then we hand pick the ones that we want in the race. We try to be gentlemen and we say your car almost fits but it doesn't do this, or we don't like your Members Only jacket. And they'll change it. We don't say dress up in some 1920s golf outfit, but it's like wear a white t-shirt or a black t-shirt with no logo on it. Don't wear a baseball hat, wear no hat or wear a cap. You gotta walk a fine line because we don't want this to be like we're LARPing (Live Action Role Playing). We're really wrenching on stuff and we're really racing. That's the key to what it is we're doing—to make it look timeless.

"I wanted to have an event that was more about kids and people and elongating our hobby because the hobby is dying. The kids, they don't care. They like Xbox, and they like rice burner bikes and cars. So, now families are coming with little kids and the kids are playing on the beach for the first time. That's another reason this is a success; men go to drag strips and women don't want to—they're smelly, they're dirty, they're boring. When you can tell your wife, you're taking her to the beach for the weekend though, she's all in!

## Aquaman and the Frozen Few

Another, lesser known event of Mel's creation took place this past February at an undisclosed location in upstate New York. It's called the Frozen Few, a race over snow and ice that takes place during the dead of winter on a 55-acre former Boy Scout Camp in the Adirondacks that Mel purchased.

"It's deep in the woods and gives us guys the chance to just be ourselves. We are boys, we just race and drink beer, with no spectators, no sponsors, no cops, no mayors, no town councils. Being a big fan of the secret societies, I like it to be mysterious. I don't want people to know where I'm riding. Because I don't want you to come there and take pictures. I don't want to have to deal with the police saying you can't do this. So, what we do is we pick a location and all the boys bomb in on it, and we have the time of our lives. It's everything I love about the race, but without all the politics.

The Race Of Gentlemen has become my job, so I don't have a lot of fun anymore. I'm too busy trying to make you have fun. So the Frozen Few has become my escape from all that with my friends."

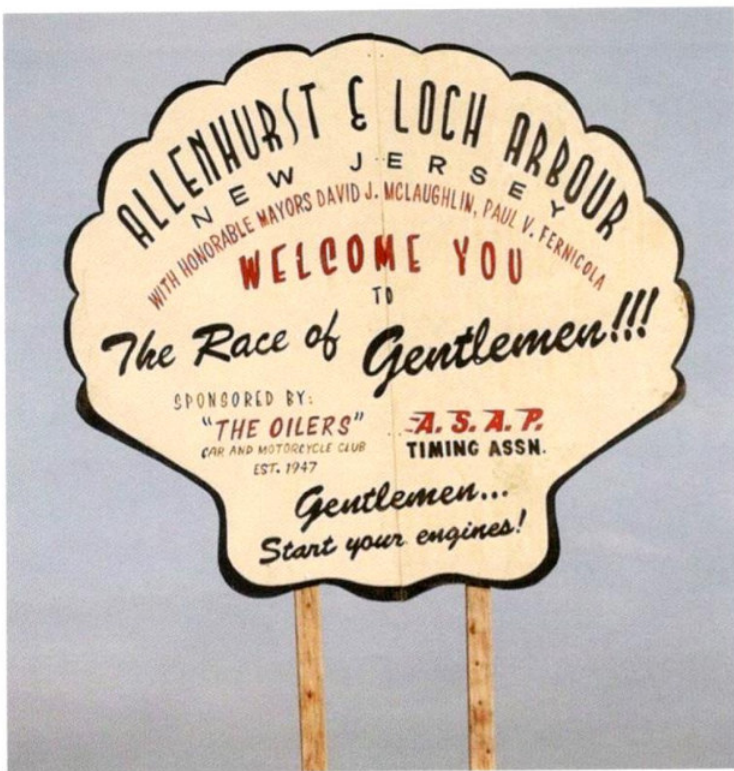
One of Few who was Frozen this past February was Jason Momoa, the enormous actor who starred in the title role of the blockbuster 2018 film, *Aquaman*. After a chance meeting at a flea market in California while Mel was on vacation, the two men struck up a friendship based on their mutual love of vintage motorcycles and trucks.

"He didn't tell him he was an actor, but women kept coming up and asking him for his autograph and to take photos. 'What are you an



"You know, it's bizarre because when people do ask me what it is that I do, I can actually look back and go, I'm supposed to be right here right now. Because all of those things were my education, from music to sign painting, to chopping tops off cars and working on motorcycles, to event promotion. It's all rock and roll."





actor or something?' I asked.

And he goes, 'Yeah, I did this thing called *Game of Thrones* and blah, blah, blah.'

I didn't know it. So then he says, 'I was the new Conan.'

I'm like, oh, yeah, I didn't see it."

**Nobody saw the new Conan. The two men have conferred on a number of vintage vehicle purchases since then, including a deal on a rare motorcycle sidecar worth \$25,000 that Mel brokered. Then Momoa came up with the idea of producing and directing a commercial at the Frozen Few event and he proposed it to Harley Davidson.**

"At first he just wanted to be a part of what I did. And a part of the films that we make. Then he said, 'I'll send my crew, but I like the crew you have, too.' He basically brought four guys, I brought four guys, and they all got along. We shot, we raced, we drank and we ate. And meanwhile, we're making a national Harley Davidson commercial.

"The concept is that we're these mysterious guys who live at this camp on the top of this snowy mountain riding our vintage Harleys. Then these new bikes roll in and get in the mix. They gave us two brand new Harleys and we modified them. So, they looked like new bikes, but they rode the way we needed them to ride."

**How many people would you usually invite to one of these meets?**

It started with eight. Originally, we were called the Crazy Eights because there's eight of us. Now there's more like 13 or 15 of us. Hot rods and motorcycles on ice and in snow on frozen lakes. But there were also some interesting alternative vehicles. There were some trucks with skis on the front. Nuts and bolts sticking out of the tires for traction the way they would have done it back in that military, tracks on idler wheels.

## One For The Road

Although it's received a lot of attention recently, The Race of Gentlemen still seems to be something of a secret society. When *Weird NJ* first tried to contact them, we noticed that the T.R.O.G. website had almost no information, unlike most modern sites, which usually offer a mission statement and copious contact options. There was no sales pitch, or anything that could be construed as brand marketing. According to Mel, that was very much a conscious decision.

"I hate the word brand, and unfortunately that's where I am now. I sit in actual corporate meetings with 14 heads and they're like, 'We love your brand.' And I'm like, I'm not a brand, I'm me, and this is just what I create. Whenever I see something weird I have to figure out how we're going to build it, because I like weird, I just always liked weird. So, I seek it out and weird finds me. So, yeah, all that weird shit's mine. It's super fun stuff.

"Everybody wants The Race Of Gentlemen—this city wants to race, Brazil wants it, California wants it, Texas... But I don't want to water it down, you know? I don't want to sell it out."

**Fascinating story of a fascinating life. And you've got a long track ahead of you yet to go. I think I already know the answer to this question, but is there a master plan? Is there a roadmap where you go from here with this traveling circus of yours?**

After this, there definitely is no roadmap. I've never been a planner. I'd say I'm a schemer, not a planner. My only concern and real job in life is being a dad. And I know that if I'm happy, and he's happy, then I'm successful. So, I don't know whether The Race of Gentlemen will last another 5, 10, 20 years, because I don't know that I'll want to do it. That's what's gotten me here in life, like a pinball machine, just boom, boom, boom! I'm keeping myself entertained.

And once I'm not entertained, I don't give a shit, I stop. I'll figure something out that excites me. I don't know where I'll be, but they'll always be rock and roll intertwined in whatever I'm doing. I know that it'll all revolve around the same shit, rock and roll, making friendships. To me, people are the most important things in your life. They're your true riches. So, to me, if I've got a good gang that loves me as much as I love them, that's my success.

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the T.R.O.G. event that was scheduled to take place this year on the beach a Wildwood had to be cancelled, as were all T.R.O.G. events for the remainder of 2020. Not one to sit idle doing nothing during the pandemic, Mel began work on a new project—a roadhouse he's named Long Tall Shorty's, named after the Kinks song of the same title. It's a large rustic bar that sits on six acres. Mel's transforming it into a "destination place," where hot rodders and motorcycle enthusiasts can meet. The place offers barbecue, live music, bars in modified vintage stainless steel trailers, and outdoor movies.

The grand opening of Long Tall Shorty's took place August 1st of this year. Coincidental as it might seem, the bar isn't located in Asbury Park, NJ but instead in the town of Asbury, NJ, in Hunterdon County. And so, it would seem that Meldon Van Riper Stultz III has come full circle, albeit in a very round-about way, which is just fine with Mel.

"You know, it's bizarre because when people do ask me what it is that I do, I can actually look back and go, I'm supposed to be right here right now. Because all of those things were my education, from music to sign painting, to chopping tops off cars and working on motorcycles, to event promotion. It's all rock and roll."





# ROADSIDE WEIRDSIDE



The COVID even affects the Bigfoot of Long Valley.  
-Elizabeth Brannin



Saw this on a hike on the Veterans Park trail in Hamilton Township. -Alexis Amendolano



Keeping you up on all the news from South Jersey. This waver has been noticed along Riverwinds Drive in West Deptford during the late days of April into May. -Paul Verlander



Bud the Dinosaur staying safe in Bayville.



Keeping watch along the 18th hole fairway at the Roxiticus Golf Club in Mendham is the "Roxiticus Indian." This large totem has been a fixture at the exclusive club since 1989, when the original tree was struck by lightning. Instead of removing the damaged tree, a member suggested that they get area resident and wood carver, Harry Robinson to create something unique with the remaining stump. The Native American theme was chosen because the name "Roxiticus" is an old Minnisink Tribe word meaning "Meeting Place." Local historians maintain that the area the golf course is now on was where tribal members met to hold council. -Keith Seminerio (Photo by Dr. John T. Whiting)



This business is closed permanently. It is on Market Street in Newark. The *Titanic* ship was called "unsinkable." I think naming one's restaurant after it is UNTHINKABLE. I guess his business just couldn't stay afloat. I wonder if chef's special was tossed salad with iceberg lettuce and maybe North Atlantic Salmon? Greg Sedlacek



This Morganville metal sculpture (now gone) was at Illusions Steakhouse (also gone). -Kate Philbrick





## THE LOWER ALLOWAYS CREEK INCIDENT



Robert Earl White points to the area of the UFO crash in 1991 in Alloways Creek Township in Salem County.

On the evening of April 21, 1991, three women reported seeing what they thought was a helicopter crash in the Lower Alloways Creek Township of Salem County, not far from the Salem Nuclear Plant. Police and rescue squads were called out and conducted air and ground searches throughout the night and into the next day, but no trace of any plane or helicopter could be found.

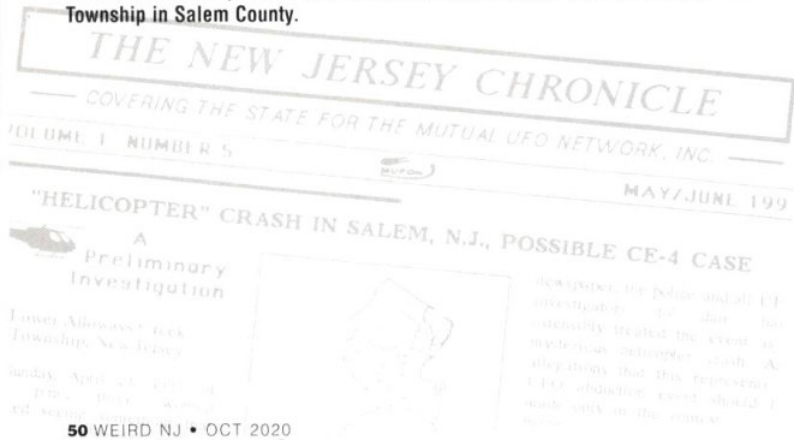
When asked about the description of the helicopter, witnesses said there was no sound, but described a big burst of light shooting to the ground. An explanation was offered of it being a possible UFO crash. One of the witnesses described the UFO as having sparks and flames, then becoming a big ball of fire, and finally falling to the ground. The object was described as solid in appearance with white and blue lights at first, then a big bright flash.

The accident was reported as being by the New Bridge Road area. Fire Chief Calvin Hill contacted the Federal Aviation Administration but was told there were no reports of missing aircraft. Hill then contacted local airports in Salem and Wilmington, Delaware, but was told the flight logs indicated there was nothing in the area at the time of the crash.

The police said it didn't seem to be a prank call because they received calls from two different reputable people. After a search of the densely wooded area, the search was called off at 3:30AM on Monday, April 22.

Richard Butler, who was the MUFON director at the time, visited the scene and homes of the witnesses, but described the area as not so dense that a crashed helicopter certainly could not be found. Some speculated it was nothing more than a meteor that may have crashed to the ground.

Interestingly, one of the women reported unusual dreams before the event happened. She would wake up nervous and anxious. She said she and her husband were at a party on Friday, April 19. Afterward she dreamed of walking out of their house into a wooded area where she saw three or four "giant hamster cages," with bright red and orange twist-ties on the cages' bars. Out of the bottom of the cages came grey and white "mongooses" that walked upright in a coordinated movement and began chasing her. There were also two snakes in her dream and she felt she was trying to save the snakes from the mongooses. She also went on to say she had never really seen a mongoose and didn't know







what they looked like.

Richard Butler thought the dream may be a screen memory of a real abduction, with the hamster cages actually being UFOs, and the “mongooses” with the odd coloring being grey humanoids. It all came down to an interesting speculation about what may have happened, then the story was forgotten. Forgotten until now.

Robert Earl White has a story to tell. One of cover-ups and the truth:

*Yes, this incident has been covered up extremely well until now, and my family was involved with it. My family always knew the truth of what happened but they were very afraid after the MIB came and made threats shortly after the incident. So the next day when MUFON and news reporters came, my family said, “helicopter” because they were told to say helicopter, although no airplane or helicopter was missing after calling all the local airports, Fort Dix, McGuire and Dover Air Force. The FAA said absolutely no reports of anything at that time were even flying by; it was raining with low cloud coverage and this craft was hovering very low.*

*It was a black triangle with white and blue lights, with a white beam of light coming out of the middle or front. It was hard to tell. Sparks started shooting out, then with a very bright beam of light it fell to the ground. I have received additional info through the guys that worked on the fire squad, which they kept secret too. When they got to the spot they could see that the marsh was all tore up like something skidded across it. The Coast Guard was there and authorities told them to, “turn back, everything is under control” so they did. Other witnesses said they saw a big tarp over something with armed guards less than 20 feet away from it and they had to cut down some trees to get to it and a flatbed came to get the object, but that Tuesday I saw a Huey helicopter for the first time in my life. I was blown away, but then I noticed it had a huge black metal shipping container hanging from it. There is a lot to this story and many layers within it. The MIB and military filled my family in and answered my mother’s three questions she asked pertaining to UFOs and aliens. They answered with no problem, but they told my mother if she said anything no one will believe you and we will take your child from you.*

*I am the first person to come forward in my family. In March I lost my mother and all she ever wanted was for somebody to believe her story but we had no proof. We could not find the TV show she was on or the news tape that she had at one point. No articles, nothing. Then a week and a half ago after 7 years of research trying to find anything I came across to two MUFON articles from 1991 and that was all I needed, but just 2 months too late for my*



## Know who you are dealing with

Information provided by Thoran, Pleiadean fleet commander from the Galactic Federation of Worlds.

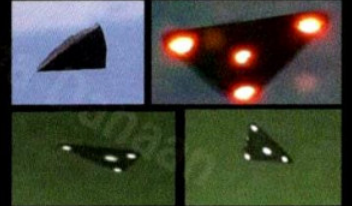
### US Air Force



**Rounder & smaller, thicker and more compact. Large hole with ring underneath. Noisy. Do not cloak. Silvery aspect. Round angles with big lights. Not dangerous**

### KILLY-TOKURT

(Tall White aliens - Tall Grey type)



**Bigger size. Smaller hole underneath with no ring, and anti-graviton beam. Thin and flat ships. Silent. Cloaking by quantum reflectivity. Black metallic aspect. Sharp angles with small lights. Hide and run**

Copyright Elena Danaan

mom to see.

*I am doing a three-part documentary which should be finished by August. My goal out of all of this is disclosure. I believe people should not be made fun of or ridiculed for seeing something unexplained. The sighting was around New Bridge Road. New Bridge Road is an old single lane bridge that was closed the day of the incident and has not been opened since. I hope to organize a few UFO watcher groups out there and turn my “Nuclear Plant Ghost Hometown” in to the next Roswell, but this is not just about a crash—it’s also about alien abductions and hybrid offspring. It’s the trifecta of alien UFO stories.*

*I am working for 4biddenknowledge.tv (with Apple TV and Amazon prime). They will be releasing my documentaries in three parts over the summer. My Facebook group page is Order Of Light (UFO and Extraterrestrial Disclosure).*

*The You Tube Channel link is: <https://youtu.be/saLiQh3lUfW>.*

Source: Reports taken from *The New Jersey Chronicle* Vol. 1 No. 5 May/June 1991

**The following is a transcript of the audio portion of a television news broadcast, telecast on April 22, 1991.**

KYW Television, Channel 3 Philadelphia Pennsylvania

Reporter: Steve Bell

Time: 5:30PM

There’s mystery in a South Jersey marshland tonight where search teams have been looking in vain for a downed helicopter. The search began last night when residents in Lower Alloways Creek reported seeing a chopper fall from the sky in a ball of flames. In the air and on the ground dozens of volunteer firefighters searched for some signs of the helicopter, but so far they found nothing. Officials say no helicopter is reported missing. Eyewitnesses insist they’re not crazy. (Witness): “I looked out the window and I was watching ... and I seen it started flaming like a lot worse... and it was like a ball of flame... and it just like fell down straight to the ground. I was starting to think that they were going to think I was crazy after they couldn’t find nothing, cause I guess they still haven’t found anything.” and at six o’clock, Malcolm Poindexter takes us to the scene with more on the phantom helicopter...



# NEW JERSEY'S ROSWELL: THE MONMOUTH UFO SIGHTINGS

by Eric Mintel

In late August of 2019 Bill Birnes from *UFO Hunters* and *Ancient Aliens* and I, Eric Mintel (Bucks County Paranormal Investigations) headed out to Monmouth, NJ to meet with Joe Foster, a retired IT director who had contracts with the State Dept. of Justice and the FBI. Joe was also Quartermaster in the U.S. Coast Guard. Joe is an eyewitness to a UFO event that happened when he was a kid and that still haunts him to this day.

The daylight sighting took place in the summer of 1958 near his home on what's now Dorbrook Park. Joe said he saw what looked like a silver sphere cruising above the treetops on Navy Road near Fort Monmouth. His father frantically ran into the house to call Fort Monmouth but the lines were jammed. What was it? Watching the craft fade in the distance, Joe never truly got an answer for what he saw that fateful day.

The UFO events in the Monmouth area took place not only in 1958 but also in 1970 with the reported sighting and landing of a UFO in the marshy area near Port Monmouth. A local police officer saw the craft land in the distance but when he got to the site it had already disappeared. However, there were marks left on the ground by the UFO. Still no explanations but it made the newspaper circuit. The next event took place in the summer of 2002 with a crop circle formation that appeared in a cornfield near Dorbrook Park, causing thousands of people to soon descend upon the site. Although the movie *Signs* came out that summer, there is still a lot of speculation about the crop circle.

We arrived in Monmouth and met with Joe. After our greetings Joe took Bill and I to the site where he saw the craft in 1958. Although Joe's boyhood home is no longer there he managed to find the site and the area where he was sitting on the ground and where he first spotted the craft. There was a line of trees across the street, but if you were sitting there you would have been able to clearly see something above the treetops.

In the summer of 1958 UFO sightings seemed to be at an all-time high. Ever since the report of a crashed flying disc in Roswell, NM that appeared in the July 8 edition of the *Roswell Daily Record*, US citizens were seeing all sorts of strange objects, sightings that are still happening to this day near Monmouth.

Joe then took us to the location of the crop circle. On the ride over Bill said, "If we can get a soil sample and do some CSI, we can try to get the soils tested for any magnetite readings!"

Magnetite in the soil would explain a material residue left by something with a high heat signature and if the magnetite readings were high the soil may become magnetic. We took a sample of the soil and as of this writing still have no conclusions.

After Bill and I looked over the scene, the hot August sun beating down on us, we thanked Joe, blasted the car's air conditioning and left for the BCPI office with more questions than answers. Silver sphere? Craft landing? Crop circle? There's obviously a lot of paranormal activity on going in New Jersey.

We filmed the story that day with the help of my team at Lab Two Twelve and cameraman Markian Bek. It is an episode for our paranormal tourism video series called "New Jersey's Roswell: The Monmouth UFO Sightings," which is also programmed on my television show (Bucks County Paranormal Investigations) on TV30 Princeton Television / Amazon Fire TV every Saturday night at 10PM. You can find our paranormal tourism videos on my Facebook page at Bucks County Paranormal Investigations: [www.Facebook.com/BucksPN1](http://www.Facebook.com/BucksPN1).

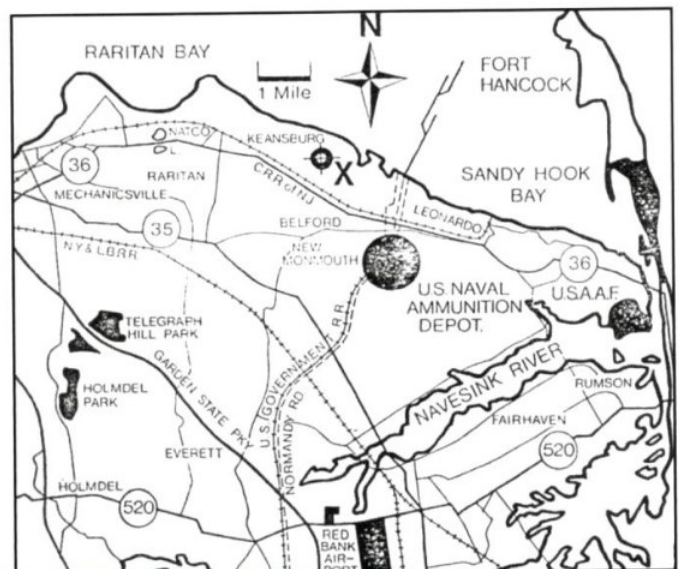
The sightings in New Jersey haven't stopped there. As of 2019 bright orange orbs, green glowing triangles and zig zagging lights have been seen and reported over Monmouth, NJ and the vicinity. There were 183 reports in 2019 alone in Toms River, Point Pleasant Boro, Colts Neck, Moorestown, Long Valley and elsewhere through the National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC), which has been in existence since 1974. To report a sighting, contact them at 206-722-3000. Only call them if the sighting was within the last week. For any local sightings within a few days you can contact Bucks County Paranormal Investigations directly at [www.Facebook.com/BucksPN1](http://www.Facebook.com/BucksPN1) and send us a message.



Photo shows an area of flattened grass approximately 25 feet in diameter that lies beneath the spot where a UFO was reported hovering for over an hour. Photo from *The Courier of Monmouth County*, Thursday July 16, 1970.



Eric Mintel, jazzman and paranormal investigator with Bill Birnes of *UFO Hunters*, and *Ancient Aliens* in Port Monmouth. Below: The Raritan Bay area. "X" shows the position of Port Monmouth; the crossed-O symbol indicates the approximate location of the UFO sightings.



## Are UFO's hovering over the Port Monmouth meadows?



# THE CONTINUED MYSTERY OF THE PLUCKEMIN MYSTERY STONES

WNJ has researched to no avail to find the location of the "Pluckemin Mystery Stones," a collection of about 65 massive stones that weighed a ton or two each and were laid out in a straight path of over 150 feet, located a short distance north of Pluckemin center. They were brought to our attention by an old pamphlet made by a local history group many years ago. The stones were cloaked by brush and weeds and were an interesting oddity. How they came to be there is unknown.

The stones had attracted attention by both geologists and archeologists, but theories as to who moved them or what their purpose is has been varied. The state archeologist at the time determined they were not involved with any Indian culture of the land, and not consistent with the early Indian civilization of the area. A report said the stones were probably left by the great glacier which covered New Jersey thousands of years ago. The state geologist called the stones pre-Columbian and were not put there by the force of nature.

They are supposedly located in an area that was once a Revolutionary War battleground. General Henry Knox had an artillery corps there. But military historians maintain the stones were not used for the encampment. Artillery pieces, they explained, were so difficult to move they were near main roads, not in woodlands.

Others said the stones may be a parallel to Britain's great Stonehenge landmark. Some speculated that the stones were imported into the area and set up as a protective guard for conferences between Washington and General Knox, who later became Secretary of War in Washington's cabinet.

The pamphlet went on to say, "A word of warning. Visitors are cautioned against searching for the stones. The stones are on private property. They are difficult to reach. Black snakes are prevalent in spring and summer. Today the stones are rarely noticed by anyone."

So, where are they? WNJ took the trip to Pluckemin to ask the townsfolk about the stones, but no one had ever heard of them. The local historical society said they would try and help, but they never got back to us.

We asked WNJ correspondent and local historian Michael Haynes about the stones, but he too had never heard of the Pluckemin Mystery Stones, even after spending so much time there, but he did offer some theories:

*The overwhelming number of stories I know from Pluckemin date from the Revolution. However, there are three stories I've heard that might pertain to these stones.*

*The first tale I heard is that there was a Lenape village located at the base of Schley Mountain, next to what is now the Washington Valley Road entrance to the Hills development. The village far predates European colonization, but was abandoned by the Lenape because they were harassed nightly by blue orbs flying over the mountain and their village. The Lenape have an encyclopedic knowledge of mysterious lights above and in the woods of New Jersey, most of which they didn't view as good. These partic-*

*ular orbs over Pluckemin later became known as the Mother Preakness Lights, named after a supposed witch who lived 20 miles away in Summit in the late 17th Century. They were later spotted by Charles Lindbergh in the 1930s while he was flying to his estate in East Amwell (I believe you published an account of that in WNJ), and also by Orson Welles, which inspired him to do the famous "War of the Worlds" broadcast in 1938 and set the Martian landing in New Jersey.*

*The second tale I know pertains to an ancestor of Gov. Christine Todd Whitman (I believe it was her grandfather). The family owns very large estates in the Bedminster area, and on one of these he constructed an artificial lake that he ringed with huge boulders of some significance—what those stones' importance was escapes me. However, the stones weren't reinforced well and they ended up plunging into the water and are now lost.*

*The last thing I can tell you about the stones is not a tale, but geology. A geologist friend of mine from Warren explained to me that Pluckemin was carved by a huge channel of melt water from the glacier of the last Ice Age, forcing enough debris to create the Sourland Mountains 20 miles to the south. It's possible that with the ebb and flow of the meltwater that several rows of boulders were naturally formed in the Pluckemin area.*

The only known photos of the stones appeared in a 1964 pamphlet on Bedminster. So where did they go?

Another Weird New Jersey mystery to be solved. -MS



65 massive stones, a ton or two each, in a row more than 150 feet long in a now overgrown section north of Pluckemin. What purpose did they serve? (From The township of Bedminster Tercentenary Pamphlet, 1664-1964).





# Hans Holzer in New Jersey

Bob and Sandra of Bearfort Paranormal recently sat down with Alexandra Holzer, the daughter of famed parapsychologist Hans Holzer. Alexandra graciously offered us an intimate look into a few of her father's NJ case files.

**BP:** Congratulations on the *Holzer Files*! We love the format of the show. We constantly hear nothing but praise from friends and fellow investigators. Will we be seeing more of you this season? What do you attribute the popularity of the series to?

**AH:** Thank you. A little bit, yes. The premise of re-introducing my father and some of his work back on a more visual platform laced with that nostalgia is the heart and star of the show. The *Files* are what drives the history to be "re-dug up" to see what's going on today versus when he was there decades ago.

What would your father think about the level of respect and admiration he has garnered?

Honestly, he was never about anything done via reality in terms of television. He appreciates the attention but only because it educates others on life after death and the true reality of getting stuck after death. It must be about the work and not get lost in the other surrounding additions that these shows can create.

We'd like to inquire about what may be one of the weirdest New Jersey cases we've come across. What can you tell us about the case of the NJ housewife Dorothy Sherry and Elvis Presley?

Dorothy was convinced of her connection and visits from the King himself. Being of interest to my father, and being that Elvis had quite the collection of spiritual books covering many topics including reincarnation, life after death, premonitions etc., made him palpable to my father as he too, felt connected to the King. My father was a big country and blues music fan and wrote some songs in that format. He was also a lyricist, composer and played quite a few musical instruments, all self-taught. It's not so unusual for this to occur but when it's someone who once was of such great fame, it makes it very difficult to be believable. Father set out in trying to let her story be told and let the readers think for themselves of the possibility and how we are all one on the other side. Elvis knew death wasn't the end in life and certainly not in the afterlife. We've brought this story back in digital form that includes other psychic celebrity stories in the book, *Elvis Speaks from the Beyond*.

We have always wanted to ask you about Ringwood Manor (Ringwood, NJ). There is so much activity on the grounds as well as in the manor itself. It's our understanding your father and Ethel Meyers were the last people granted access to formally investigate the property back in the 1970s. What did they encounter?

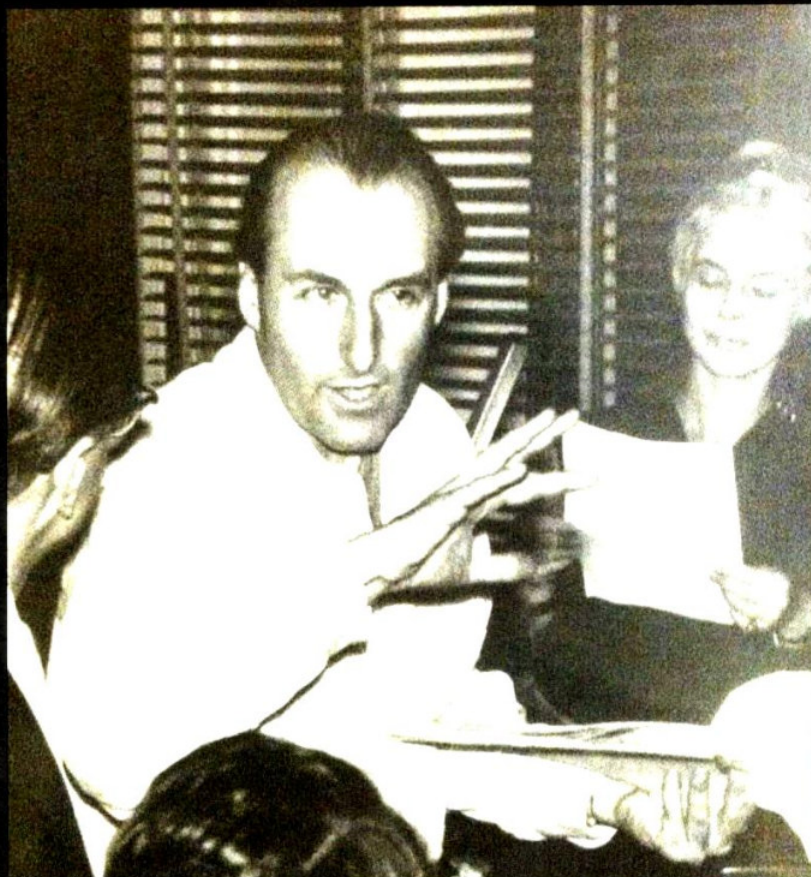
I went on a tour at Ringwood Manor when I just turned twenty. What I personally experienced there was not just with the Madame's quarters but also the grounds themselves around the pond. At the time, I was attending the Fashion Institute of Technology and didn't start writing until four years later encompassing my calling to accept the work that my father and mother lay before me. I hadn't read the book he wrote on this location and so, was very much in the dark about his findings there with Ethel. After my visit, I spoke to father of my experiences and he sat there smiling, placing his folded arms and hand over his chin with his pinky upwards. He was pleased.

All my childhood experiences were quietly only shared with my mother's mother, Rosine Claire, whose late husband was the Count of Russia. Being extremely psychic and clairvoyant herself, she became a safe place for me to communicate beginning at age five.

My father knew who I met that day on the tour and why he smiled after I told him. The lady of the manor greeted me the same as how Ethel saw her. There's something to be said about having a tall woman in an off-white flowing gown look dead-center on right at you!

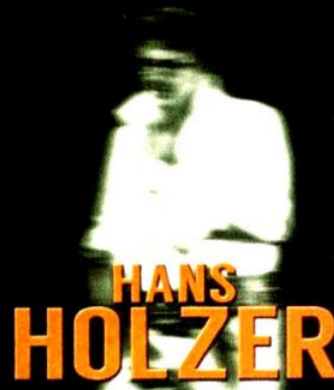
We had an experience while investigating the area by Sally's Pond as well. Upon reviewing our evidence, we discovered we captured an EVP (Electronic Voice Phenomenon) shortly after we walked down from the manor. A woman's voice very clearly stated "I've come to see you."

Lambert Castle (Paterson, NJ) was featured on the first season of the *Holzer Files*. While



## THE HANS HOLZER DIGITAL COLLECTION

### ELVIS SPEAKS FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE







Dr. Hans Holzer and daughter Alexandra.

the Lambert family generally thrived during the early years, there is much death associated with the property. Mr. Lambert, his first and second wives, and many of their children died within these walls. Spirits are rumored to inhabit the castle and its grounds. The claims are quite unusual, especially the story about the woman who dreamt of the castle for well over 30 years. She always felt she was living with some sort of secret which eventually led to a past life regression all these years later.

Sometimes people become very attached to a property for various reasons. One could be they own it and feel like it is part of the family. Another reason can be a past incarnate that is reconnecting the individual back to the same place in a different time. Or, both but it's unclear in the beginning as to what the meanings are in the current life the person is living. Trans-digression sessions and other means of hypnosis were used to help try and solve the mystery of these repetitive connections often times leading to dreams. The dreams aren't necessarily dreams as we think of what a dream is—but actually scenes from our past life in real-time like watching it for the first time. Then, it occurs again.

My father asked those with these claims to keep a journal, a diary of sorts to log each happening. He believed that these eventually would make up pieces to the puzzles that individuals would soon put together. It is time consuming which is why it is crucial to live your life aware and open as soon as possible.

**Unfortunately, your father never quite made it there even though you lived under an hour away. He felt he was being blocked. What are your thoughts on this?**

Despite the relatively close proximity of where he lived, if one is not meant to be somewhere for whatever reason, take stock on that theory as there is such a thing as timing and proper collective energies being in synergy. Just because an individual claims things, it doesn't always verify that it's real. He didn't discount the dreams and was rather curious about these types of claims so he further researched them on a global scale.

You have to be able to leave a place, thing or person if you aren't getting results and let it rest. Sometimes a return trip can occur perhaps yielding different results but we are not superheroes swooping in to find something to always ghost bust! Sometimes, it's just not meant to be in that moment. And moments are what we have in life, making up a collective of occurrences and happenings all throughout our daily lives. That is very much the heart of the field of physical research. Energy, good and bad—and past, present and future timelines crossing from time to time.

**Thank you for that incredibly beautiful and thoughtful reminder. We appreciate your time and the personal insights you have shared with us.**

*The Holzer Files* airs on the Travel Channel. Filming for season two is currently underway.

## About Alexandra

Alexandra Holzer has appeared in numerous film documentaries exploring the paranormal; on TV as a paranormal expert; and as a guest or guest host of hundreds of national talk radio shows. She also created a paranormal segment for Reading Pennsylvania's morning show WY102 on WRFM, a commercial FM radio station.

As a result of her ongoing contributions to the field of the paranormal, Holzer has been featured in *Broadly-Vice Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *Rue Morgue*, *Fortean Times*, MTV News Online, The Associated Press, People.com and *Teen Vogue*. She was also profiled on *Hamptons.com*.

Holzer is the author of *Lady Ambrosia: Secret Past Revealed* (2007) and *Growing Up Haunted: A Ghostly Memoir* (2008). Holzer's other written works include contributions to AOL's Huffington Post, Canada's *UFO Digest*, and the popular, holistic, green-zine *OM Times*. She carries with her a fresh, trademark journalistic approach that doesn't hold back or shy away from the truth.

Holzer successfully partnered with the 2013 "Pulp Ark Award"-winning "Best Author" Bobby Nash to create the book *Alexandra Holzer's Ghost Gal: The Wild Hunt*, with a forward by Ghostbuster Ernie Hudson.

She and her husband run Hunt with Holzer, a research and investigative organization carrying on The Holzer Method. They live in New York, have six children and a bunch of rescue fur babies.

Bob and Sandra Bandov run Bearfort Paranormal based in West Milford, NJ (bearfort-paranormal.com) To hear the EVP captured at Ringwood Manor, please visit Bearfort Paranormal on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/pTvrnC424c>





## THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE OF FOIL

by John A.

I've explored hundreds of abandoned houses over the years but this one was different. At first glance it looked like your typical old farmhouse set back from the main road. As I got a little closer, I noticed that all of the windows on the side of the house were covered with aluminum foil. At first I didn't think much about it. I walked around the back of the house and saw that the kitchen door was open. I had to go in. The house was clearly abandoned. There was insulation hanging down from the ceiling and a horrible smell of mold and mildew. It was very dark inside so I opened one of the shades over the kitchen sink. Wow, this place was totally trashed. There was stuff everywhere and most of the ceiling panels had collapsed into the room. Personal belongings were everywhere along with cobwebs and mold. The place looked like it had been abandoned for 40 years ... yet the calendar on the wall said 2013 (this was in 2019). I opened the fridge and it was still full of food. The date on the eggs was March 2014.

I snooped around the kitchen for a while and peeked in a few cabinets and drawers. That's when I noticed the strangest thing — sheets of aluminum foil on the inside of the cabinet doors and also lining the kitchen drawers. Hmm. Not just one, but all. It was even behind the pictures hanging on the kitchen wall. Very strange.

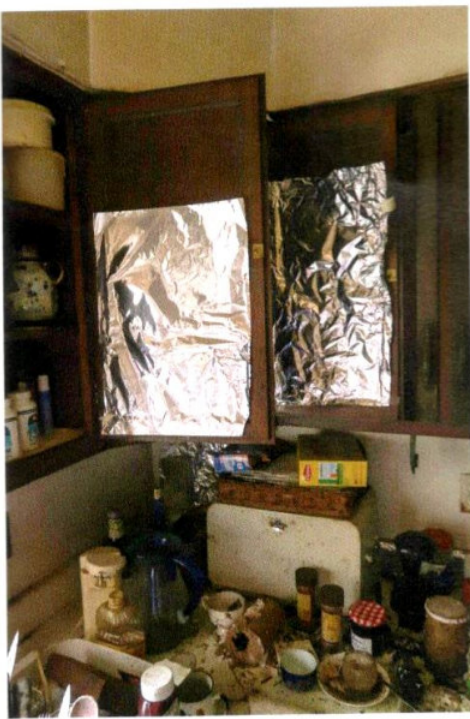
Next stop was the dining room. It was totally ransacked and overwhelming. Stuff everywhere. No graffiti or animal poop, though. The living room was messy but nothing like the two previous rooms. Personal belongings included books, furniture, paperwork, computers, radios, knick-knacks ... even a full liquor cabinet. Windows in the living room were covered in foil and there was also a large piece of foil taped to the wall. I removed foil from two of the windows to get some natural light in the house.

The more I looked around, the more foil I noticed—sometimes just a random patch of it on a wall or on the floor. In other rooms it was covering the windows.

Compared to the rest of the house, the foyer looked practically untouched. The front door was unlocked and opened easily. It was nice to get a breath of fresh air before exploring the rest of the house. As I closed the front door, I noticed the foil on the back of it. I passed through the foyer into the bathroom. Foil city. There was foil on the walls and even on the ceiling above the tub. It







was also behind everything in the medicine cabinet. Oddly enough, there was no foil on the bathroom window.

There were two ways to get upstairs: the stairs in the foyer or the stairs in the kitchen. I went up the stairs in the kitchen, that way the rest of the house would be in front of me and I wouldn't be coming up in the middle of it. Kind of a feng shui thing. The bedroom at the top of the stairs was over the kitchen. The blinds were down and did not have any foil on them but there were sheets of foil all over this room. Nothing made sense in this house. Why foil here but not there?

I passed a bathroom at the top of the stairs. It was trashed, although I have to say—the toilet paper looked brand new and certainly not five years old.

What I saw next sent chills through me. Looking from one bedroom into another I could see what looked like an entire room wallpapered in aluminum foil. The only light in the room was coming from the hallway. My curiosity was stronger than my fear so I moved closer. I stood in the doorway and saw aluminum foil in every direction. Not only was it over the windows, but it was on the walls and on the ceiling and on the floor. It was also on the bed. It was as if aluminum foil was being used as a blanket. There was so much foil that it took me a minute to realize that there were windows in this room in the first place. They had been completely covered.

There was clothing in the closets and underwear and socks in the dresser but at the same time, the place was trashed. Nothing made sense. The bed was even in the middle of the room. There was no electricity and no running water ... and more cobwebs than the Munsters' house.

I started snapping pictures like crazy, knowing I might never have the nerve to come back in that house once I get out. It was the strangest thing I have ever seen. I ended up going down the main staircase, knowing that the front door would be there at the bottom. My mind was racing. Who lived here? I was trying to understand why that



room would be covered in aluminum foil. WAS someone living there now? Would they be coming home soon? Were they trying to stay warm or were they trying to keep the aliens out?

I felt safe once I got down to the first floor so I took one more look in the liquor cabinet that was in the dining room. I got down really low and spotted a square aluminum tin tucked in the back. It turned out to be someone's ashes and that someone's name was written on it. Who puts a dead person's ashes in their liquor cabinet? So strange. I took a picture of it and left.

I've driven by that house since my first visit in September 2019. I got goosebumps when I saw that all of the windows that I had uncovered are now covered in foil again.





## Walpack Environmental Education Center Returns to Nature



by Rusty Tagliareni and Christina Mathews

The ghost town of Walpack, NJ holds many stories. Huddled away in a hazy valley, it simply exists. Without people, though not devoid of life, and certainly not lacking in secrets. One such esoteric treasure can be found just off Main Street in what was once the town center, beyond an open field of tall grass, and just past a long-disused observatory. There, nestled at the edge of the forest, stands the former Walpack Environmental Education Center.

Though abandoned for years, the building seems not unlike a summer camp shuttered for the off-season, apparently ready to reopen at any time, though that time is never to come. The endless purgatory of the school was guaranteed in the spring of 2003 when funding for the property was entirely cut. In short order the doors were locked, the lights turned off, and the rooms and halls of the Education Center fell forever silent.

Remarkably the buildings were never cleared out, never emptied of their furniture, fixtures or materials. Seemingly everything remains behind, moldering through the seasons and the years. Innumerable articles, though trivial during the school's time of use, now serving as relics, small windows to a prior time and place. Fragments of the past lives who knew the school.

Before the overgrowth and peeled paint, back when the center was at full operation, it served as a mixture of not just a school, but a summer camp. Programs here lasted from 2-5 days, with chores and exercises in communal living incorporated into the environmental curriculum. It truly must have been a stunning place during its prime, encircled by hundreds upon hundreds of acres of forests, mountains, waterfalls and wildlife. To this day the region seems almost fictitious in its pastoral beauty, like a setting pulled from





Remarkably the buildings were never cleared out, never emptied of their furniture, fixtures or materials. Seemingly everything remains behind, moldering through the seasons and the years.







some grand adventure novel, though dotted with the occasional abandoned home and rotting structure.

Today the bunk beds of the former school rust away in the darkness. Across the floor lays insulation and ceiling tiles, felled by the endless years of summer heat and freezing winters. Still, pillows and blankets remain atop mattresses, though decaying and discolored. The fetor of deep rot and stale air dominates the entirety of building which was once lodging. It hangs thick around you, as does the summer humidity, clinging to your clothes and upon your skin long after you leave.

Within the school proper, the crafts room brims with children's artwork and supplies. Rain ponchos yet hang on coat hooks in the entry foyer, and upstairs desks are stacked away. The last children to know this place are far from children any longer. In fact, many may even have children of their own. The years outside these walls have proceeded as normal, but within time appears to have slowed to a crawl. A school turned time capsule, and a palpable example of just how slow or fast years can pass us by. A silent reminder that childhood is fleeting, as is life. This is the final lesson which the old school reveals to us.



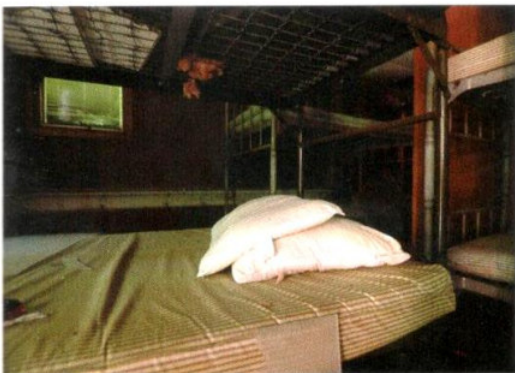
\*Regrettably, at some point following our visit vandals tore through the town of Walpack. The damage was not limited to just the Walpack Environmental Education Center: The offenders also damaged buildings in the town proper. Those accountable may never be caught, but hopefully, in time they may realize what they did, and learn to do better for themselves and others. If you would like to help with restorative







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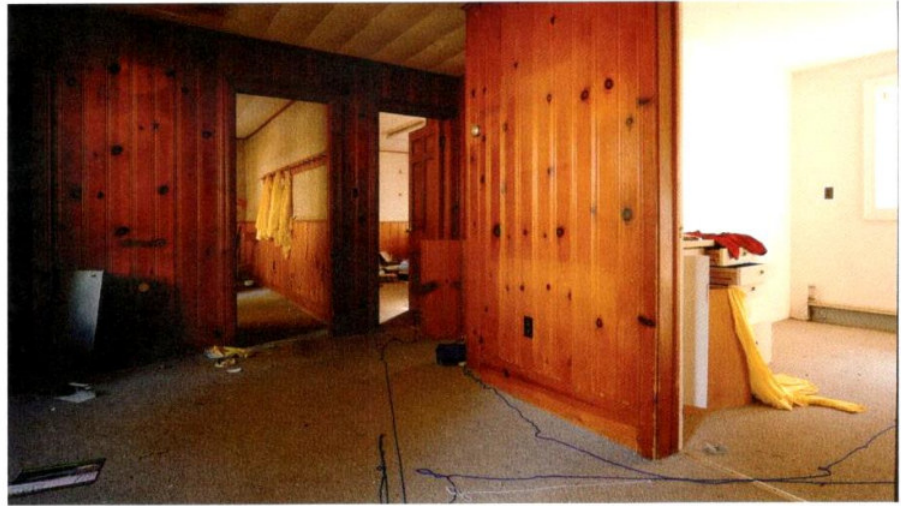


efforts, monetary donations to the non-profit are welcome and can be mailed to: Walpack Historical Society, P.O. Box 212, Layton, NJ 07851.

Anyone with information about the vandalism can anonymously leave a tip via text with the National Park Service Investigative Services Branch at **888-653-0009** or by email at [nps\\_isb@nps.gov](mailto:nps_isb@nps.gov).



Take a video tour of the Walpack Environmental Education Center by scanning this QR code or visiting our website at [AntiquityEchoes.com](http://AntiquityEchoes.com).



## Weird Observations in the Walpack Woods

by Mark Moran

There was an odd sight I'd often wondered about while traveling the seemingly endless, winding route of Walpack Flatbrook Road through the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. It was a small, square building with a dome-shaped metal roof that stood in the middle of a vast open field. It was located on the outskirts of the little ghost town, Walpack Center, which con-



sists of about a dozen historic buildings and even fewer inhabitants. The dome shape was a clear indication that the isolated little shack was an observatory, albeit a humble one. Eventually my curiosity got the better of me one hot summer day a few years ago and I decided to stop and explore the little star gazing outpost.

I pulled off the main road at the closest driveway to the observatory I could find. The dirt path first led past a white farmhouse with a little red barn, which both seemed completely abandoned. Beyond them lay a much larger cinder block barn crowned with rusty metal ventilation units on its roof. Beside it was a disused basketball court with weathered backboards and net-less hoops. Tall grass poked up through the court's cracked, sunbaked asphalt. At the end of the little dirt road was a large two-story building that looked to be a long-abandoned overgrown house.

It was a much newer structure than the old farmhouse that stood at the main road, circa mid-twentieth century, I'd guess. From the look of the vegetation which was entangled around it, I'd imagine it had been left for dead a long time ago. The front door was unlocked and ajar, so I decided to have a peek inside. The interior was in surprisingly good condition—so much so, in fact, that I tried the light switch on the wall to see if there was still electrical power. There was not. The knotty pine paneled rooms gave the place a quaint country vacation cabin feel. It was obvious from the collection of school desks and the remains of half-finished art projects present that the place had been an education center and most likely a day care camp at one time. Bright yellow children's rain ponchos still hung dutifully on pegs on the wall. There was an art room with a rustic stone fireplace and a table strewn with paints, modeling clay and balls of yarn. At the far end of the room there was a large open space surrounded on three sides by windows. Within that space someone, perhaps



the children who were once enrolled here, had strung colorful strands of yarn into what appeared to be a complex maze. The sun shining through the dirty windows made it look like the web of a spider at first light when it's wet with a rainbow of dew.

It was all very curious, but I decided it was time to go see what I had stopped here for in the first place, the observatory. As I made my way across the tall grass of the open field, I noticed that there was a relatively new looking solar panel mounted to a pole that stood adjacent to the building. To my surprise, the door of the observatory was actually unlocked! I let myself into the small enclosure. It only contained a few benches and a ladder that led up to the telescope area. Sitting on the floor in one corner of the room was a wooden box about the size of a mini-refrigerator. Its door was open and inside lay a tangle of wires and electronic hardware. To my great surprise, flashing little LED indicator lights proved they were ON! A couple of power lines ran from the box through a hole in wall to the solar panel outside, which seemed to be powering a remote weather substation device.

If this place still had power, I thought, might it still have a telescope? I ascended the ladder toward a hatch in the ceiling. I pushed it open and climbed into the swelteringly hot metal dome above. Nothing there but a few angry wasps. The eye to the heavens had been removed. Still, it was interesting to see the mechanism by which the dome was once rotated and opened unto the stars.

I decided to have a look at the large barn I'd passed on my way into the compound of buildings. Once again, the door of this building was wide open. The inside was pitch black though, as the boards over the windows allowed in very little light. I could tell that I was surrounded by banks of steel bunk beds, some still containing mattresses, sleeping bags and pillows. Most had the

remains of fallen ceiling tiles and moldy fiberglass insulation draped over them. It was like a nightmarish scene out of summer camp slasher movie.

I exited the bunkhouse from hell and wanted to take a look at the farmhouse and barn I'd first seen when entering the property. Peeking in the window of the beautiful old farmhouse I could see that it had been cleaned out, leaving nothing but hollow, empty rooms. So, I strolled over to the charming little red barn behind it with the circular window under the eaves at its peak. Well, I'd say it wasn't really what you'd call a barn, more like a two-tractor garage with white wooden swinging doors. But it also had a room surrounded on three sides by glass windows. As I peered in through the wavy glass panes, I observed the strangest of all the sights I had seen in that weird compound: There in the spartan sun-dappled atrium, sat a single, well-appointed bed with crisp matching sheets on the mattress and a pillow, folded and tucked neatly, with a dust ruffle beneath. An embroidered blanket was draped carefully across the foot of the bed with a folded, crocheted quilt laid on top. Beside the bed stood a white high-back chair. A floral woven wool rug lay on the leaf-strewn floor next to the bed.

It all seemed too fastidiously decorated to be the abandoned bedroom of some squatter. So, what was this place, I wondered? Was somebody actually living here? It certainly seemed unlikely. There was no electrical power or appliances, or running water. There were no apparent signs of habitation, like food containers or clothes left lying around. But there was that well-made bed, pristine as could be, and looking like someone might retire to it at any moment. Someone had to have made it with such care, after all, but who...and why?

I decided to leave that mystery for some other curious observer to figure out.

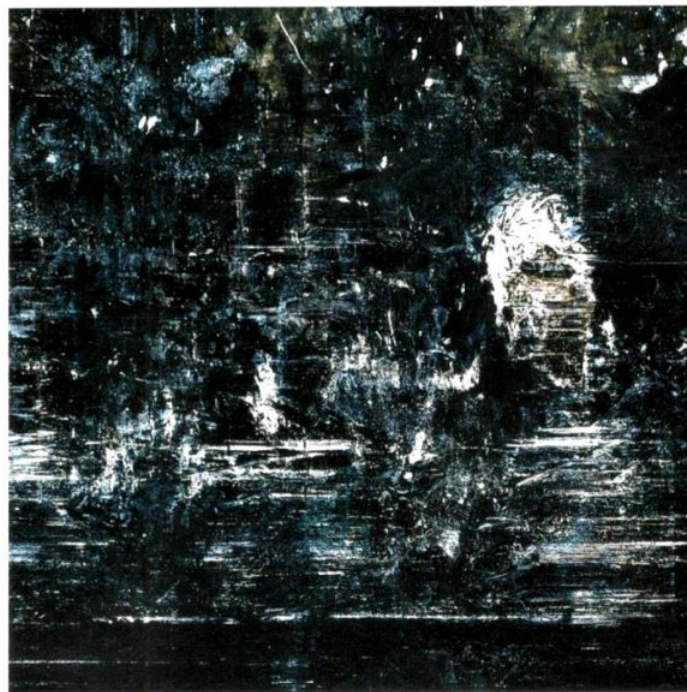
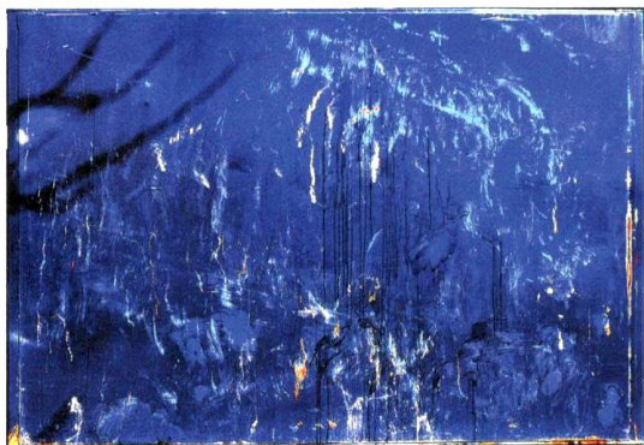
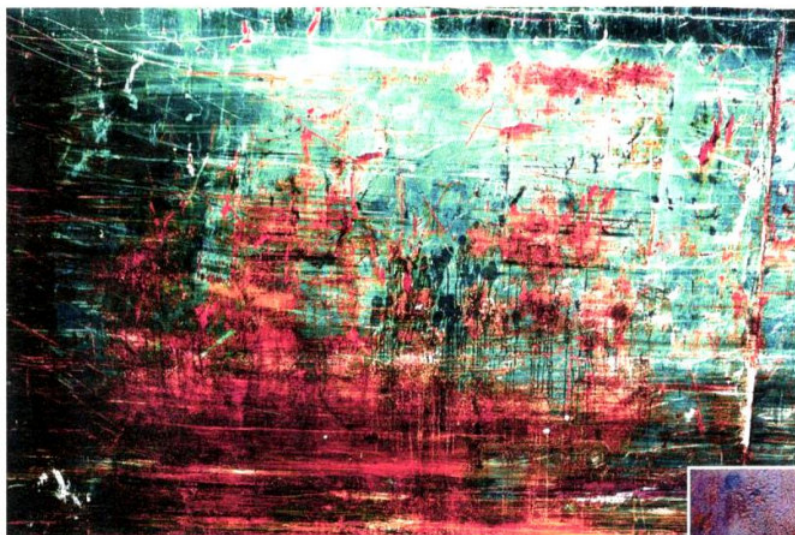


PHOTOS BY RUSTY TAGLIARENI





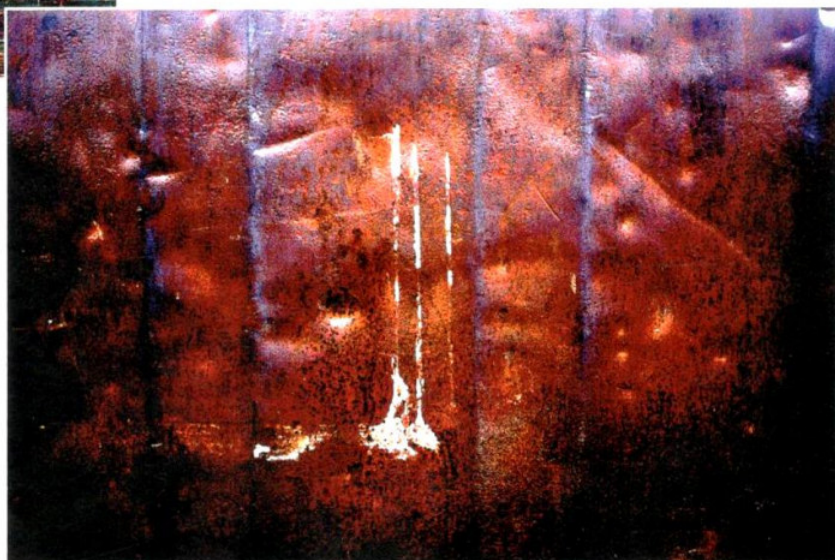
## The Art Of The Dump(ster)



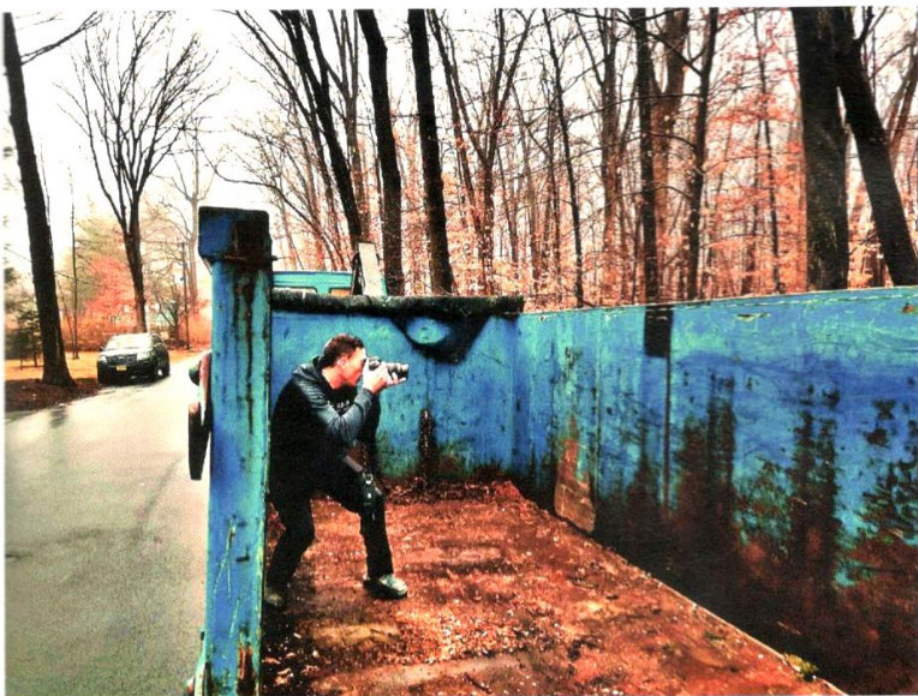
While I was between jobs I picked up a side job working construction. I was doing mostly demo work and for each job we would order a large dumpster in which to toss the construction waste (sheetrock, concrete, metals, paints, etc.). I had always been interested in the arts and have always had a well-developed creative side. One day while I was opening the gate to a 30 yard dumpster I noticed it has these remarkable features, like fine works of abstract art. I grabbed my cell phone and started taking shots of the dumpster. Long story short, everyone I showed the photos to was blown away with the images. One reviewer called it, "a perfect morph of realism and abstraction within a fleeting moment in time." I laughed but he was pretty serious. I ran away with the idea and have been chasing dumpsters ever since. I have over 300 photos now. The interesting part of this is most of it comes in the form of trespassing. I have been chased by tough guys and have climbed through fences and over bushes, and have run down the sides of highways, just to throw open a gate to a dumpster. Most of the time I try to ask for permission but otherwise I am unearthing heavy metal wherever it lies.

— Ryan Davis

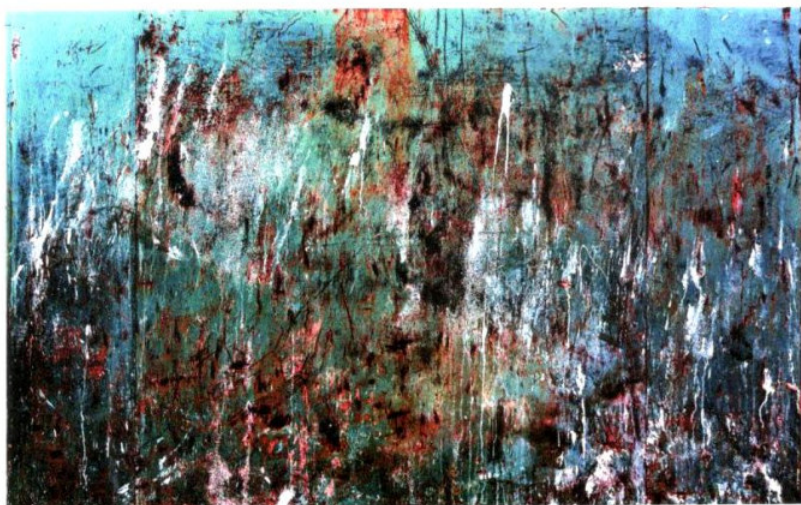
Ryan's website is [www.seikopath.com](http://www.seikopath.com)  
and he is also on Instagram at [@seikopath\\_](https://www.instagram.com/seikopath_).







Ryan Davis at work in Ramsey.







Shirley Stewart of Williamstown sits with her talented cats next to her red dragon creation.

by David Zayas

My wife and I love Halloween decorations. Every October we drive around different neighborhoods and marvel at the intricacies of the displays and the dedication of property owners to the spirit of Halloween. Glassboro, Pitman and Woodstown are reliable in their yearly output. But a display in Williamstown truly captured our imagination and blew us away.

El Diablos Gatos Cemetery in Williamstown is a wonder to behold. A 18 ft. tall red dragon, wings spread, lords over a graveyard filled with caged clowns, rock 'n' roll werewolves, sewer zombies, a gigantic headless horseman, and other unique ghouls and gourds. And within this world of full-sized haunts, there is a miniature haunt filled with tiny displays, each alive with sound, light and movement. There is so much to see there. And just when you think you've seen it all, you come face to face with honest to goodness real, live feline acrobatics.

This wondrous display of talent sits on a corner lot at 701 Crystal Drive in Williamstown, off of the Black Horse Pike in South Jersey. Unlike most of the other haunts I... well, haunt, I did not just drive by it. This display is deep on the other side of a lake, in a residential area, a winding way away from the main road. It is not the kind of place you will find by accident.

We discovered El Diablos Gatos through their Facebook page. The few pictures we saw online were enough to whet our appetite for artistic weirdness and set us on our journey. We followed the GPS off the main road and down several lightless lanes until we turned a corner and saw several cars parked along the street surrounding an oasis of multicolored lights. There were several small groups of people walking on and off the property, heads as if on a

## PERSONALIZED PROPERTY: THE EL DIABLOS GATOS CEMETERY

swivel, as they stared this way and that in obvious amazement.

As we wandered among the life-sized mannequins and the professional-looking displays, my wife and I both assumed that whoever was responsible for the property must surely work in the special effects department at a movie studio. Such was the quality and uniqueness of what we saw. The details, from the design of a horse-drawn carriage to the funny carved names on the gravestones, spoke of a mastery in construction.

"I have absolutely no training," Shirley Stewart, mastermind behind El Diablos Gatos Cemetery, told *Weird NJ*. "I learned through my mistakes and the internet. We come up with an idea and try to execute it. If that fails, we try something else. It's all trial and error."

Shirley, and her husband John, have been presenting the El Diablos Gatos display on their property since 2008. Nearly every single piece on display has been meticulously hand crafted by Shirley. "I construct and he animates," she said of her husband's involvement. "He has a degree in computer sciences, so he handles the electronic aspects, the sounds and the lighting. He comes up with the ideas and I do the actual fabrication."

Creativity and creation have obsessed Shirley since she was a child. "My mom knew I had ADD at an early age. In the stone age they did not have a name for it." Her mother brilliantly channelled her daughter's excess energy and got her involved in crafts. But her focus on crafting for Halloween came as an influence from an old roommate down in Texas. "He loved Halloween and he would decorate inside and out. I got hooked," she said.

The name El Diablos Gatos was inspired by one of her performing cats, Cinni Mini. "He is as smart as a whip and very bad. We called him the devil. Along with his partners, Tugger McNuggets and Pumpkin Moon, they became 'The Devil's Cats.' We named the cemetery after them."

Those cats perform actual tricks for the amazed crowds. They climb up a ladder and make their way along a wooden plank, balancing on their little paws high above our heads. The children in attendance alongside us gasped in unison at the cats' display of agility. And they all cheered and clapped when the felines completed their circuit. The show added to the sense of whimsy that permeated this place.

El Diablos Gatos Cemetery strikes the perfect balance between scary and whimsical. Even though it is a Halloween haunt full of rotting zombies and monsters, not all of them feel threatening. Many creatures evoke a sense of warmth and friendliness. The vibe here is more like *The Nightmare Before Christmas* than *The Exorcist*. Yet, with the exploding zombie heads at the shooting booth and the monstrous zombie clown climbing out of the sewer, there are still some truly horrifying creature concepts on display.

"There are no places like this for children," Shirley explained. "It's an alternative to the horror fest where you are being chased by a chainsaw. This is nice. Little kids can come. I usually say 3 and up. And they can come and enjoy it with their families without being terrified. We try to keep the gore to a minimum."

While most neighborhood haunts comprise pre-fabricated props and monsters churned out by Spirit Halloween factories, nearly every piece here is unique. Each display is handmade by Shirley, working from the blueprints which live only in her mind. We get an undiluted look into Shirley's wild imagination. You will see things at El Diablos Gatos which don't exist anywhere else in the world.

"Most store-bought toys have exposed power packs that cannot last in the



elements," she adds. "Our toys have power packs inside the displays which are packed into and protected by sealed plastic bags."

At the top of our list of favorite displays, and by far one of the most creative concepts, is the Elvis Werewolf family. A 6-foot tall, hulking werewolf decked out in a full Elvis outfit and shades strikes a pose with his skull guitar while his poodle-skirt-and-pearls wearing wife and their werewolf brood are along for a stroll.

On how she came up with that idea, Shirley explained, "I found a fabulous werewolf mask two years ago, on a post-Halloween shopping trip. So we fabricated a body for him out of PVC tubes and chicken wire. I found some monster hands and feet and stuffed them with pool noodles and covered them in fake fur. But he was just a werewolf. He had no pizzazz. We wanted to give him a voice. And I figured one of the most famous voices around was Elvis. People young and old know of Elvis, or at least have heard of him."

"Even though his pants and shirt are from the Goodwill, I added the red highlights and the stitching. I also made a cape for him with a glittery eagle. I created his belt and my friend Elizabeth bedazzled it. I topped it off with some very Elvis-like shades."

"Then we needed a guitar. There was a children's movie called *Coco*, and I liked the design of the guitar. So, I created a replica from foam and added the Day of The Dead designs. The neck is vertebrae ending in a skull with smaller skulls for the knobs."

"Once I created Elvis, I found some other, smaller werewolf masks and created a family for him. My friend Vicki was a huge Elvis fan, so I fabricated a female werewolf named Vicki as his wife. And then I made two litters of pups. The first litter is Cooper and Elizabeth, and the second litter are the baby twins Royalty and Princess. I fabricated the poodle skirts the girls are wearing, because it is daunting to find a poodle skirt for a six foot tall werewolf."

"Every time I create a new display I give it the names of family/friends who helped create or inspire it. I have a friend who loves Halloween as much as I do. She also has every issue of your magazine. She sends me many ideas. She and her 13-year-old daughter gave me so much help this year, I would not have finished without her. I love them."

Another striking piece is the scary clown reaching out a skeletal hand from within a hanging cage. This one is Shirley's favorite. "It was our first toy. We created everything from scratch. It showed us we could do anything together."

One of the most imposing constructs is the 18-foot-tall red dragon. "That took nine months to create," she explained. "It is made from papier mâché, painted and then covered in sealant. It breaks down into smaller pieces for storage but we leave him up for people to enjoy."

Another great piece is the headless horseman. "He is 8 feet tall. So, I had to make all the clothes, even the boots. The boots are made of yoga mats, which have been heated and molded. The axe is hand carved with a skeleton



inlay. That took four weeks, because it is elaborate. The hands are molded out of clay."

In the center of the El Diablos Gatos display is a small shack surrounded on three sides by wide plastic windows. Inside this shack is a whole other world of miniatures. Small castles, graveyards, windmills, ships and even dirigibles are among the many tiny scenes on display. Detailed figurines, some ambulant, surround each set piece, creating little stories to distract your eyes. Each one of them could be its own little horror masterpiece.

"I purchased the miniature houses," Shirley explains when I asked about them. "A company called Lemax makes them. I have about 95 houses. I bought the first one in 2002. I was getting several pieces each year. There are about 150 to 250 smaller pieces, also store bought. I made the building, settings, tombstones, pumpkins (over 400), trees and shrubs. I hand punched all the leaves."

When asked about security concerns, she assured me that there are a ton of cameras hidden discreetly throughout the lawn. "My husband is always watching the screens. He's not really a people person, so he sits inside the house making sure all is safe."

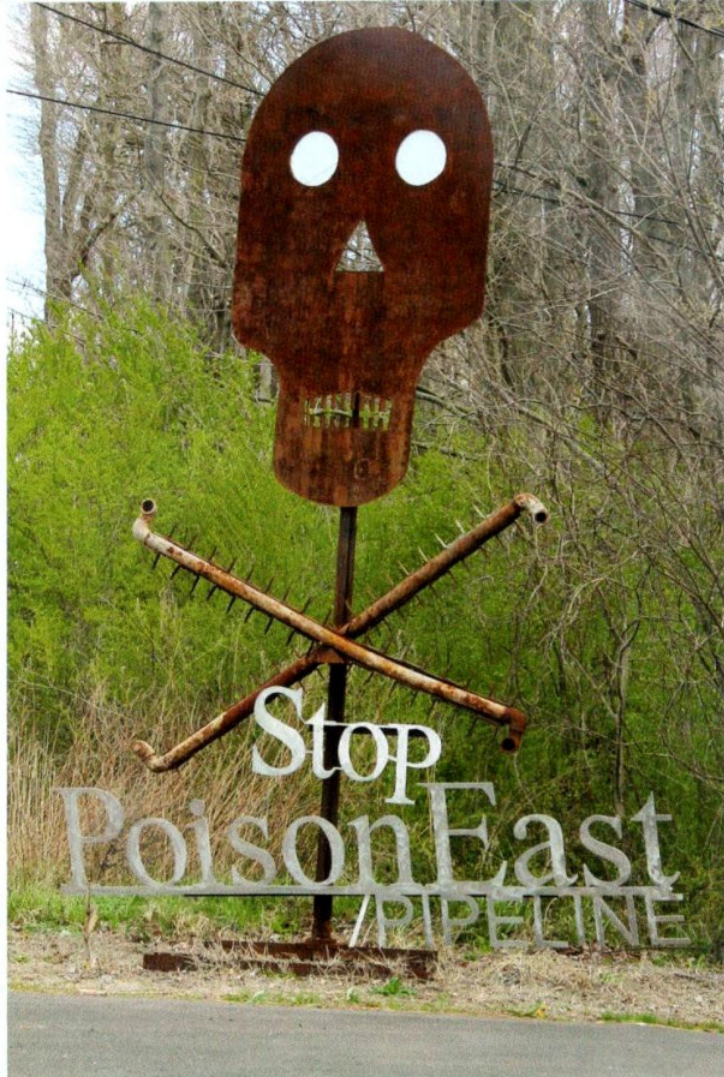
As for electricity costs for such a huge display, she says, "We used a custom-made system of 'Octopus Lights' that John created. It is a central hub with four long plastic arms ending in LED lights. They run on the ground through the displays. It costs less than the air conditioner during the summer months."

The public's reception to Los Diablos Gatos has been overwhelmingly positive. "The public loves it," she said. "You should read some reviews from my Facebook page. They are best read in their own words."

But the neighbors' response has been far different. "My neighbors hate it," Shirley confessed. "Four of my six closest neighbors are hypocritical haters. They have all actively tried to stop me. But the town-



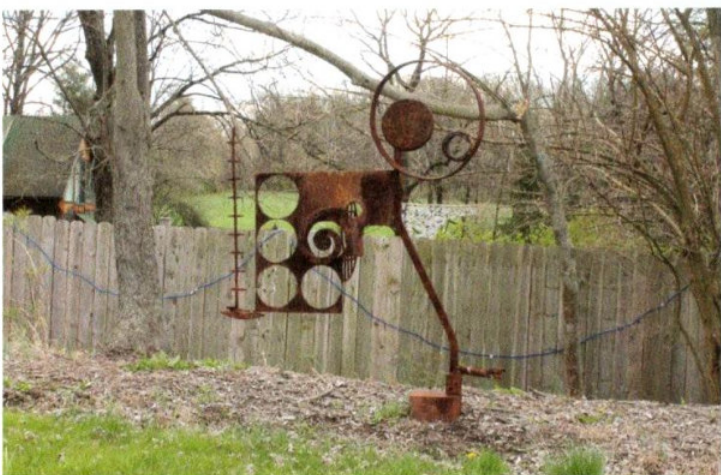




## Poison Art in Stockton

Driving down County Route 523 in Stockton N.J., I noticed a sign that looked like a giant skull and crossbones. The area is pretty wide open with lots of open fields, red barns, and a few cows, so the sign stood out. After making a u-turn to investigate a little further, I realized there were other sculptures on the property. From the road you can see a metal mobile made up of a black base, a red disc, a yellow brace, and suspended blue arcs. A collection of rusty metal parts was combined to create another sculpture. Inside the fence on the property you can see a wheelbarrow or tank transformed into a happy little creature. At the entrance to the property are the tall skull and crossbones, reaching at least 10 feet high, with the words "Stop Poison East Pipeline," referring to the PennEast Pipeline project. There are other structures scattered behind the fence, as well.

*-Nick Quig Clemente*



ship always tells them I am not breaking the law. One neighbor attacked one of my guests and called them satanists. They came out screaming things a good Christian would never say to another person. She has an issue with people parking on the street and she puts out a ton of garbage cans to make it harder for people to find parking. So the township told her she needs to put her garbage cans back because they do not allow them to be out."

"The township has been very good to me. They love my displays, and I have several supporters in the township. But when the neighbors call them to complain, they have to still have a duty to the public."

It shocked us to learn she is stopping her displays. This was the final year she was doing it.

On why she is stopping the displays, she explained: "It gets tiring and the display creation and set up consume more time than people can imagine. I'm old and tired and not well physically. I have a frozen shoulder and can't lift my arm above a certain spot. Putting up stuff hurts, and it's a task that consumes my entire year. All winter long I am out here in the shed and tents creating. Even though I have special heaters, it's still cold. And all summer, I labor in the intense heat."

Shirley has a plan for next year: "I would like to spend my summers enjoying life. I plan to help others with their displays. My friends and I want to be in next year's parade. I plan to go to lots of other Halloween haunts."

Some of her displays will find new life in other people's haunts. On the future of her work: "I'm going to sell them. I've sold several pieces already, like the clown in the cage. I also sold The Wizard of Oz display. The



Nightmare Before Christmas sold. Somebody wanted Werewolf Elvis and his family, but we haven't settled on a price yet. And the giant pumpkin sentinels has been sold. It has been mostly from people who have taken the tour and were so impressed, they wanted to buy them."

When we asked her what Halloween means to her, she said: "I have never been a normal conformist. They have called me crazy or weird ever since I can remember. Every one is weird on Halloween. Plus, through my displays, I have met some amazing people who love my brand of weird. It has given me a chance to create, learn and share my art. I tell people that I have ADD openly, and that this creation results from that. And if their child or loved one has ADD, if encouraged, they could create their own greatness. Plus, you can celebrate Halloween and not go into debt buying presents. While I'm not a Wiccan, I appreciate some of their core teachings, principles and beliefs. And I have read many, many, many stories on the origins of Halloween and enjoyed them with an open mind."

Although 2019 was the final year for the El Diablos Gatos display, its creator's work will live on. Shirley Stewart sells finely crafted, custom made tombstones for Halloween Haunts or even everyday decor. They can turn any yard into a cemetery. If you would like to learn more about her creations and possibly order some, you can reach her at [smandcats@hotmail.com](mailto:smandcats@hotmail.com) and check out her Facebook page El Diablos Gatos Cemetery for more photos of her haunt.





# IT'S THE END OF THE ROAD FOR CENTRALIA'S GRAFFITI HIGHWAY

**Graffiti Highway**  
**Beloved Canvas of Controversy**  
(1993 – 2020)

## We're at a loss for Words

The Graffiti Highway—best known for its colorfully worded cracked asphalt, urban artwork style drawings, and (sometimes) steam rising to the surface from the coal fires that burn below—was buried under truckloads of dirt at dawn on April 6, 2020.

Formerly part of Pennsylvania Route 61, the .74-mile paint-covered stretch of roadway has had a colorful past. It once ran through the coal mining town of Centralia, a municipality incorporated in the 1850s with a small bustling community up until a century ago.

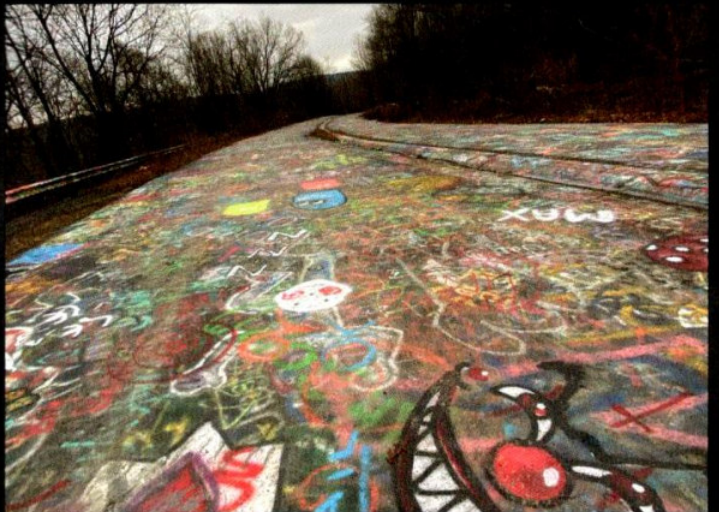
Things changed for Centralia in 1962 when the worst coal-seam fire in U.S. history raged out of control and spread through mine tunnels beneath the streets, creating hazardous carbon monoxide levels for residents. All attempts to extinguish the fire failed and the town was deemed unsafe. Centralia was condemned in 1992 and essentially became a ghost town.

It may have been the end for the town of Centralia, but it was just the beginning for the Graffiti Highway: fire damaged and undriveable, but a blank canvas for curious visitors armed with cans of spray paint.

The Graffiti Highway soon became an unofficial tourist attraction and popular meeting place for explorers, dirt bikes, and ATVs, which led to more than a few bumps in the road and things started to steadily decline. After every inch of roadway had been spray painted (several times over) by vibrant and imaginative words and graphics, it wasn't long before the artwork began extending into the woods and a nearby historical cemetery. In addition to the graffiti expansion, there were reported incidences of theft, vandalism and excessive partying.

The final straw came at the onset of the pandemic after defiant locals and visitors from all over the area gathered there to party and accidentally set fire to some surrounding woods. Despite statewide social distancing requests, the partying continued, fights broke out and no trespassing signs and barricades were blatantly ignored. It wasn't the first time that disruption posed a liability for the Highway, but it certainly was the last.

So after nearly three decades of colorful words and artistic expressions, it's now the end of the road for the Graffiti Highway. Just as the fires continue to burn deep beneath Centralia, so will the highway's memorable graffiti beneath many tons of dirt. —Cheryl Ann Marino

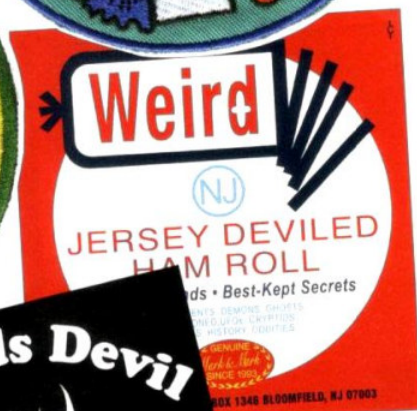
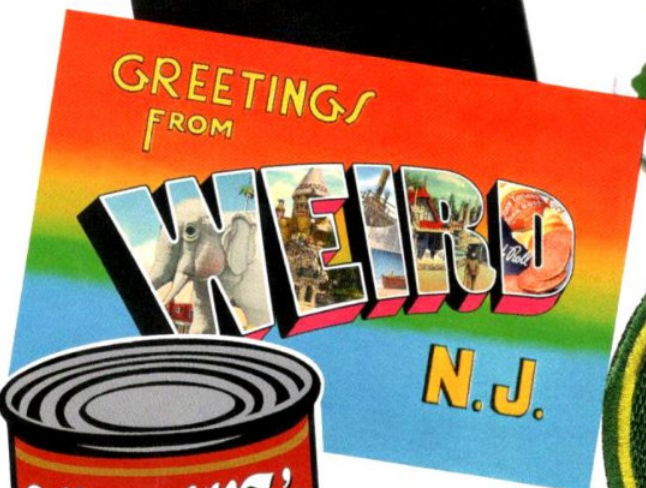
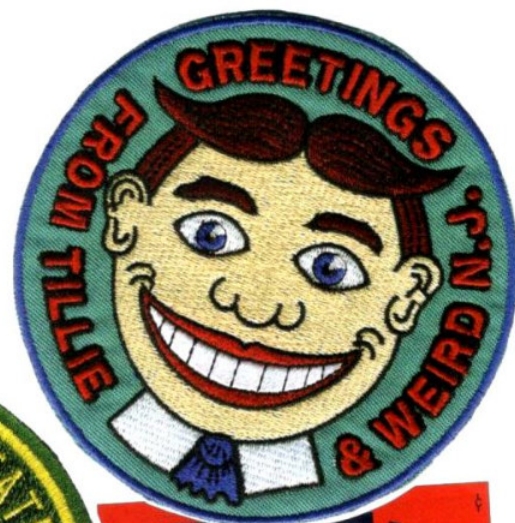




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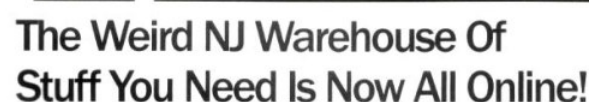
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